

CHAPTER FIVE

HOLIDAYS & FESTIVALS



CELEBRATION OF ST. ANNE
IN SCRANTON, PA

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Chapter 5: Holidays & Festivals

Introduction

When members of the Montrone and Gaudenzi families gather in celebration, it's a time to honor elders, reaffirm core values, including family, traditions, country and religion, and enjoy time together.

Looking back, Helen (G2 – M) (Montrone) Mastro remembered that her father Antonio (G1 - M) relished and encouraged close family gatherings and celebrations: “He enjoyed sitting around the dining room table with all of his family joking and laughing after dinner, you know. And he would think nothing of spending maybe . . . at least two hours around the table. He enjoyed communicating and conversation with the family.”¹ His son, Angelo (G2 - M), clearly inherited that gene. In sum, his eldest son, Gene (G3 - M), put it this way:

The Montrone family is legendary for its parties, and we had parties at every possible occasion to have one.

Another gift from my father--he was a great guy to host groups of friends, family, whatever. If he could have done a party a day, he would have done it. But they did it as often as the events allowed.²

The Giancini family had the same trait. Paul recalled visits to his grandparents' homes.

We got together very often. Every holiday or important family event, the broad family would be together at Nonni T's [Settimia (G1 - M)] ... aunts, uncles, cousins, children, grandchildren. You have a lot of kids. You have a lot of in-laws. A grand meal and then plenty of action. The men would play cards and have intense arguments about politics and other topics. We would play lotto. It was right out of the book. . . That was the action. At times, during celebrations there would be a few Italian immigrant friends playing the mandolin and other instruments. Music was an important part of life. It was classic.

We would also visit my father's side of the family, led by Nonni Montrone [Maria (G1 - M)], at holidays. It was more subdued because my father's siblings didn't marry,

except for Helen, who only had one child, so there weren't spouses, in-laws, grandchildren ...we were about it. It was a nice warm visit, but it was much more [like] visiting, having coffee and cake or something else homemade and delicious. . . much quieter, never a noisy celebration. The family spark, Antonio Montrone, had passed on and everyone was more reserved. . . very organized, everything neat.³

Family sizes and styles vary, with some more boisterous and extroverted and some more subdued and restrained. But when it comes to observing holiday traditions, the centrality of family is paramount.

Today, many people of Italian heritage have found it a challenge to maintain the same high level of holiday observance and family interaction as experienced in years gone by. In the present day, people might live farther apart, have more demands on their time, or be preoccupied with other priorities.

Paul's younger brother, Tony (G3 - M) Montrone, recalled frequent family gatherings from his youth, with regret that they trickled off into infrequent celebrations of major events, such as his First Communion, Confirmation, and high school graduation.

Once his older brother, Gene, moved back to Scranton and had a more spacious location, and since there are still many members of the broader family in the area, Tony says, "Gene decided he wanted to try and reinstitute these family celebrations, which he did. Everybody kind of looks forward [to them now]. We have this annual gathering in the summer, in July and St. Ann's day, and [now we gather to] celebrate different events."4

Each celebration had distinctive customs, beliefs, and foods associated with the occasion or time of year. Christmas is a Holy Day, and the Roman Catholic tradition is that the vigil of a Holy Day is a day of abstinence (no meat allowed). So

for Christmas eve, for example, it is fish, 7 or 12 different fish dishes, depending on your Italian tradition.

For New Year's Eve and Day, *cotechino* and *zampone*, symbolize abundance and fullness of life, while poultry is avoided due to its association with poverty. Lentils (shaped like small, round coins) and raisins are also associated with bringing good fortune, and honey is often gifted to wish others sweetness and peace in the coming year. Toasts are made with the Italian sparkling wines Spumante and Prosecco, or in the case of the Giancinis, the cherished homemade wine from barrels in their basement.

Natalie (G2 – G) Cavagnaro recalled an exchange with her sister on this close relationship between a holiday and its particular foods and observances: “I did the cooking, and she [my sister] said, ‘How come you only make [that dish] for Easter?’ I said, ‘How come we only put a Christmas tree up for Christmas?’ Everything has a tradition . . . That is the custom.”⁵

Over time, as Natalie expressed, established traditions simply become pleasurable, satisfying parts of life, enriched by, but not dependent on, the background history and symbolism behind each custom and menu item. On a deep level, they come to feel right.

Lent and Easter

The Lent and Easter season lasts almost a month and a half, beginning with Ash Wednesday and ending with Easter Sunday, heralding the beginning of spring. Shrove Tuesday, the day before Lent begins, has been celebrated by some groups as *carnivale*,⁶ featuring masque parties (like Mardi Gras in the U.S.), jests, and special foods—as way to prepare for the penitential season of Lent.

Even though the Italians may have more elaborate celebrations (with Venice offering one of the most famous), their Italian American counterparts usually still observe this aspect of the Easter season to some degree.

Gerry (G3 - G) (Gaudenzi) Colizzo recalled, for example, a treat always made by her Nonna Mary (G2 - G) for “Fat Tuesday.”

My paternal grandmother’s sweet on Shrove Tuesday was Fretellas, cooked similar to pancakes, and sprinkled with sugar. I called my cousin John Perugini’s wife, Jane, and was able to get Aunt Clem’s (G2 - G) recipe [so we could continue the tradition].⁷

Having reveled, or at least eaten a great deal, the night before, Catholics traditionally fast on Ash Wednesday, and at a special Mass, the priest marks the shape of the cross on their foreheads with ash (symbolizing that our bodies came from ash and will return to ash).

The Ash Wednesday service launches Lent, a period of penance involving prayer, almsgiving, fasting and abstinence, symbolizing the forty days Jesus fasted in the desert and resisted Satan. Part of the self-denial associated

with this time means not eating meat, on Fridays in particular. Commonly, people foreswear a particular food or activity that they really enjoy during those six weeks to evoke a connection to the sacrifices of Jesus. Often, it is fasting from sweets, which is why the sweets of Shrove Tuesday can seem all the sweeter.

The final week of Lent is Holy Week, beginning with Palm Sunday, which commemorates Jesus' arrival, by donkey, into Jerusalem. Palm leaves, representing those waved at Jesus and placed in his path, are blessed and distributed to parishioners. Four days later is Holy, or Maundy, Thursday, commemorating Jesus' Last Supper with his twelve apostles. In many Catholic churches, priests wash parishioners' feet—or sometimes the feet of twelve men—as Jesus washed the feet of his apostles.

In Ceccano, Giovanni (IT – M) D'Annibale participated in this tradition as part of the “Guild of the Holy Death,” his granddaughter Beatrice (Giancini) Montrone recalled:

He joined different [guilds]—they wouldn’t be clubs, but whatever the church had to offer. At Easter-time, these particular holy men, twelve of them, were the ones who were picked to be the twelve apostles, and the priests would wash their feet. . . They would call it the “Guild of the Holy Death.”. . . It was popular then.⁸

As a child, Giovanni’s great-grandson Paul Montrone grew up in Scranton with the tradition of observing Holy Thursday by going to three different churches.

This tradition represented how Christ was sent to Pilate, then he was sent to Herod, then sent back to Pilate. The whole idea was to reenact the night he was arrested and sent to these different places. . . Usually, you would go to church for Mass on Holy Thursday Night, and then to the other churches. After the Mass, they would keep the churches open very late and welcoming visitors from other parishes arriving deep into the night.

The practice of visiting several churches on Holy Thursday has tapered off in recent times. As Paul described, most

churches now close earlier than they once did, owing to lower attendance and security concerns: “We still do that. And [we did that] when our kids were young. Not very many people do this now.”⁹

In celebration of Good Friday, the day of Jesus’ death, processions are sometimes held in the streets to reenact his trials, to present a statue of the Virgin Mary and a glass coffin, as well as to pray at the Stations of the Cross, either along a specified route or in a church afterward.¹⁰

The *Processione di Venerdì Santo* in Gualdo Tadino, ancestral home of the Gaudenzi family, has one of the most well-known Italian reenactments of the Stations of the Cross.¹¹

Holy Week ends with Holy Saturday, a day for purification and, after sundown, a long candle-lit Easter Vigil. All candles are lit from the Paschal candle (representing the

Risen Christ) that is in the Sanctuary, to signify the spreading of the “Light of Christ.”

On *Pasqua* (Easter), eggs symbolize Jesus’ emergence from his tomb, a rebirth, like a bird hatching from its shell.

Traditionally, eggs were stained red to represent the blood shed during the crucifixion, with baskets functioning as symbolic nests for the eggs. Today this has exploded into all kinds of colored Easter eggs.

Sandra (Gaudenzi) Montrone, like many Americans, has maintained the tradition of filling Easter baskets. “We have baskets, always. I still get everybody baskets. In fact, for years I shipped them to Saint Thomas for [my daughter] Michele and her family. That’s what I do. It’s part of who I am.”¹² For years Sandra and her family also had an Easter egg hunt outside in their yard for the young family members.

The old tradition of Easter eggs evolved into chocolate eggs and then to Easter bunnies, which, as Paul observed, makes it difficult to keep the concentration on the fact that Easter is all about the risen Christ.

Easter bread is another once a year special delicacy. This apparently originated as a ring of bread representing the crown of thorns suffered by Jesus. In some traditions, colored eggs are often braided into Italian Easter bread. Festive holiday breads (*pigna*, *colomba*, and *crescia*) and various cheesecakes (*crescia al formaggio*, *torta pasqualina*, *pastiera*, and *fiadone*) remain popular foods associated with the holiday.¹³

Another popular food was lamb, symbolizing Jesus as the lamb of God, and the Good Shepherd. Gene Montrone tried the tradition of Capuzzella d'Agnello, roasting and eating the whole lamb including its brain, which was found to be tasty!

When two people marry, they will usually combine their holiday food customs. Sandra has continued the Italian tradition of baking Easter bread for the Easter holiday. She also makes pizza fritte, but she makes this on Christmas day and has passed on the cooking skill to her children and grandchildren (see Box 5.3).

Paul recalled his and Sandra’s efforts to merge their individual Easter traditions and a problem developed: “She never ate lamb at home, but I did. So, she would never serve lamb. ‘Why don’t you serve some lamb?’ [I would ask] ‘No, I’m not going to do lamb,’ [she would say]. It took years for her to eat lamb, and finally she cracked.” Sandra added only a discerning coda: “Well, if you don’t get the right lamb, it tastes muttoney.”¹⁴ Eventually, her family won her over and grew up eating the right lamb.

Tony Montrone remembers another family tradition – pizza fritte.

This was an Easter treat in my family. Pizza fritte is essentially fried dough covered with sugar. My mother would start the day before and it would rise all night. It was usually done on Holy Saturday because it was best eaten immediately or at least no more than a day later. There was always a debate as to exactly when the Lenten fast was over, but never with my father. He always said that Lent ended at noon on Holy Saturday. It was when he would enjoy his first cigar after Lent and when the pizza fritte would begin being cooked. Pizza fritte was best enjoyed right after it came out of the fryer, quickly dipped in sugar and allowed to cool for five minutes.

As a youngster, all my friends from the neighborhood would descend on my house and we would consume everything that was initially coming out of the pan. As I got older, my high school friends would be there. I think that was the period of my mother's largest productions. Even when I got to college, one year we made the drive down from Syracuse so my college friends could have the experience.¹⁵

Italian Americans have not tended to observe *Pasquetta* (Easter Monday) to the same degree as Italians do. People on both sides of the Atlantic typically enjoy a family meal on Easter, but Italians also take advantage of the Monday holiday to picnic with friends in the countryside.

At the end of the Easter season, various Italian cities celebrate the Virgin Mary in some way. Locals in Gualdo Tadino, the home of Sandra's father's ancestors (the Gaudenzi and Capoccia families), observe *Festa della Madonna di Monte Camera* on the Tuesday after Easter. This festival is a six-mile procession from *Pieve di Compreseto* to the shrine of Our Lady of Monte Camera, in honor of a similar pilgrimage said to have cured lepers during a time of plague.¹⁶

Memorial Day

Long a day of special meaning to Italian Americans, Memorial Day honors those who gave their lives in service to our country. It also seeks to recognize and thank others

unrelated to military service who are loved, missed, and remembered. The holiday has been celebrated in some fashion in America since the Civil War, though its modern title was not established until almost one hundred years later. Traditionally, the day was set as May 30 every year, until the Uniform Monday Holiday Act was passed on June 28, 1968.

To Paul and Sandra , this Act had annoying consequences, as Paul described:

We were married on what was then Memorial Day, May 30th, 1963, so we would always have a holiday on our anniversary. . . . But it was changed from May thirtieth to the Monday nearby so everybody could go have a three-day weekend. And, what was the consequence? The federal government came along and mucked up our anniversary. Your government at work.¹⁷

Tony Montrone remembers that May 30th was special in another way:

It was the birthday of Nonni T [Settimia]. She chose to celebrate her later birthdays during her 50s in a different way. She wanted to spend them with her husband, who had passed away, a daughter named Marie who had died around age two, and her son Mario (G2 - M), who was killed in World War II. She would have my father or my uncle Dave [David (G2 - M)] drive her up to Cathedral Cemetery, early Memorial Day morning. This had to be timely because after 8:00am, you needed a pass from the cemetery to be able to drive in, something we would always forget to get. She would set up her blanket and chair over the grave and lay out enough food to feed a family all day. Our family house and Uncle Dave's were both a few blocks' walk from the cemetery.

Throughout the day we family members would go up at different times to get some of her delicious food. My cousins would come up to our house and we would walk through the back gate [of the cemetery] to get in. Outside of eating, and saying a few prayers, there was not much to do at the cemetery, thus the coming and going all day.

In the evening, we would all go back to Nonni T's [house] for a big meal, always a large boiled ham with spaghetti, and of course, birthday cake. ¹⁸

Regardless of the exact date, Memorial Day observances always centered on visiting cemeteries. For Sandra, "Memorial Day was always a huge holiday. At the cemetery, they would have people selling ice cream and pretzels. . . We got all dressed up to go to the Cathedral Cemetery and visit all the relatives buried there."¹⁹

Sandra's husband, Paul, spoke about how this holiday made him more mindful of cemeteries in general, and how, intrigued, he and Sandra would seek out these sacred places on trips around the world. Paul observed:

A holiday that was much more important in my generation than today was Memorial Day. We would all go to the cemetery. It's interesting because that little piece of the puzzle [is] probably where my fascination with cemeteries comes in. Whenever Sandra and I travel around the world, we always check if they have an

interesting cemetery and we have found some very special ones, for example, in Genoa, Buenos Aires and Zagreb.²⁰

The importance of visiting cemeteries and honoring the dead was passed down from older Italian-born family members to later generations. Antonio Montrone (G1 – M) took care to show his grandsons the tradition, as a way of spending time together. Gene recalled,

He would say to our Mom, “Do you mind if I take the boys . . .”—in Italian, of course, this all went on—“ . . . for a walk?” And, she would say, “No. Where you going?” “Up to the cemetery.” That was his thing. On holidays, Memorial Day, Veterans Day, he would be visiting the cemetery . . . and that was his thing to do with us. . . Anyway, we go up to the cemetery. I would walk up with him. And, on the way, he and I would converse, because he had to know a little English to get his job. So he had a little English. We’d go up, and we’d go from grave to grave. He would point out and try to tell me the stories of the people he knew that were buried up there and what kind of friends they were of his.

This practice led to a Memorial Day that grandson Gene still chuckles over.

So we were up there, and we visited the grave of a friend of his. He told me the story again about this friend. Then we went somewhere else. But then, he looks over, and while we're at the somewhere else, he sees the family of that person coming to the grave. All right? And he says to me, "We're going to go back to that grave." He says, "Don't tell them we were there before." So we go back to that grave.

While the family is there he shuffles over, and he begins semi-sobbing at his old friend's death. And, they say, "Oh, Antonio it's so nice that you come to visit your friend. After you leave here, if you want to come over to the house for some wine. . ."

"Okay," he says. "If I can get some time."²¹

Columbus Day

As described in Box 5.1, Columbus Day was first established in 1892, not to honor Columbus, but as an apology for the New Orleans lynching of Italian immigrants in what is believed to be largest recorded mass lynching in American history. Over the succeeding decades Columbus Day became the secular holiday most associated with Italian Americans and celebrated by their descendants and the broader community. It is an expression of their gratitude for being able to become Americans, but without forgetting their heritage.

Speaking from his own experience in Scranton, Gene described some of the factors behind this holiday's special significance.

That was essentially an Italian American holiday. Scranton is a very ethnic community. In fact, I think there were something like thirteen or sixteen ethnicities that are represented in Scranton. And each little ethnic group celebrated their day. So the big Italian ethnic holiday was Columbus Day.²²

Explorer Christopher Columbus (known in Italy as Cristoforo Colombo) came from Genoa, only eight miles from the birthplace of Joseph Cavagnaro (Sandra's paternal cousin). Columbus was long credited with the European "discovery of the Americas on October 12, 1492, while on a voyage financed by Spanish King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella I. ”²³

Sandra's cousin, Joseph Cavagnaro, who came from the Genoa area, insisted on observing Columbus Day. His daughter Natalie recalled, “Every time the twelfth of October [came around], my father wouldn't work in the mine. He wouldn't go to work.”²⁴

Originating from the Molise region in southern Italy, Antonio (G1 – M) Montrone belonged to the Columbus Club in Scranton. His daughter, Helen (G2 – M) commented, “I know [that on] Columbus Day, he used to be with that crowd. In fact . . . he was in the newspaper there with an

American flag on Columbus Day at the Courthouse Square.”²⁵

Gene, grandson of Antonio, described Columbus Day as a time when his grandfather would express his gratitude, loyalty, and love for his new country.

The other thing I remember about my grandfather was he was a fantastic patriot. He was so happy to be in this country it was unbelievable. So Columbus Days he would always be home. He would wrap himself in the flag, or whatever, and we would celebrate. He would celebrate being in America. And that was the way he celebrated. Columbus founded America, and now he’s in it. . . That was his big thing, yeah.²⁶

Box 5.1: Columbus Day

Americans with historic ties to every region in Italy still gather for parades (harking back to the Italian tradition of

saint's processions), community banquets, and other events scheduled for the long holiday weekend.

Over time, the broader community has joined in the celebration. Since the 1990s, the Steamtown Marathon has been held on Columbus Day weekend in Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania. Runners from all ethnic groups and heritages leave from Forest City and finish in Scranton near Courthouse Square.²⁷

New York City still hosts its annual Columbus Day parade on a grand scale, as do other cities. The New York parade features a well-known Italian American as Grand Marshal, who has sometimes even been a friend of Paul and Sandra. The parade has about 150,000 marchers (including school bands and many others not of Italian American heritage) and draws around two million spectators.

Recent years have seen some hostility toward Christopher Columbus and denial of his “discovery.” It has become more

widely publicized that the Vikings reached the Americas hundreds of years before Columbus and that Columbus and his crew decimated and enslaved the native populations. These distorted views have left many Americans disillusioned with the holiday. Some Italian Americans worry that these increasingly negative views of Columbus will also “erode national recognition of the Italian American presence.”²⁸

Paul is a staunch supporter of Columbus Day. It is a day for Italian Americans like he and his family to thank the U.S. for accepting their ancestors as legal immigrants and opening up the American Dream for individuals like them. He says:

Certain groups bent on promoting “racism” now want Columbus Day to be replaced by Indigenous People’s Day. First of all, most indigenous people I have met do not suggest that Columbus Day should be replaced. They are simply striving to have their own holiday. The head of the famous Hopi tribe in Arizona told me that the

Washington, D.C. politicians are behind the elimination of Columbus Day.

The big problem is that Columbus Day has been misinterpreted, even by many current Italian-Americans. It is not a celebration of Columbus; it has become an expression of thanks to America by Italian Americans. Just look at the picture shown here. It is my grandfather and a large group of Italian immigrants on the steps of St. Lucy's church, the Italian American parish in Scranton. What are they holding? American flags. They are saying thank you America. Even more broadly, this holiday is the only day celebrating immigrants, on whose backs our nation was built. Perhaps the holiday should be renamed American Immigrant Day.²⁹

Italian American groups, such as UNICO National, have also worked on having October recognized as National Italian and Italian American Heritage Month.³⁰ As Congressman Michael E. Capuano of Massachusetts stated when the resolution to support Italian-American Heritage Month was being passed by the House of Representatives in

1999, “October, as we all know, is a month that we celebrate Christopher Columbus Day, and it is a month that many Italian Americans across this country have utilized to remember their own heritage and their own background.”³¹

Currently, the President must sign an executive order each October to establish Italian American Heritage and Culture Month because Congressional resolutions from 2010 and 2011 to establish a permanent federal observation of the month have not made it past the committees. Some states (such as New Jersey, where the Montrone family was first established) have passed statewide resolutions to continually observe the month.³²

Barack Obama’s White House Proclamation of 2010 makes a powerful statement of the purpose behind these initiatives: “During Italian American Heritage and Culture Month, we recognize the rich heritage of Americans of Italian descent and celebrate their immeasurable contributions to our Nation.”³³

Currently, one of the missing celebrations that could easily be embraced by Italian Americans would be that of Amerigo Vespucci and his voyages to the New World. As a result of his explorations, North America, Central America, South America and the United States of America, all bear his name.

Box 5.2: Amerigo Vespucci, America's Namesake

Thanksgiving

American tradition holds that the first Thanksgiving celebration took place in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1621. After the Civil War Battle of Gettysburg in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln decreed that the “American People . . . set apart and observe the last Thursday of November . . . as a day of Thanksgiving.”³⁴ Thanksgiving became a legal public holiday in 1941, around the time the United States was entering World War II.³⁵

When Italians first made homes for themselves in America, they had to learn the traditions of this holiday. Paul’s Aunt Flo (G2 - M) (Giancini) D’Annibale described what that was like growing up as a second-generation Italian American.

You would be going to school. Thanksgiving would come around, and of course the kids would talk. “Did you have turkey?” “Oh, yeah, turkey. What did you have?” “Turkey?” I would say, “What’s turkey?” And they would have a good laugh. So, I’d go home and I’d say to my mother, “What did we have for Thanksgiving?” “We had a capon.” “What’s a capon?” Everybody had turkey but us. I had to say that I didn’t know what we had. We wanted turkey. So, [my brother] Mikey [Mario] and I would start that song and dance. The next year she [my mother] would get a turkey. . . The same thing would start because she didn’t know that a turkey has got to be cooked for “X” amount of hours. . . You’d be ready to serve the turkey, and it wasn’t cooked. This used to happen for a couple of years until somebody realized, “Well, we’re not cooking it long enough.”³⁶

But it didn't take long for Thanksgiving traditions to become standard practice in Italian American households. One November when Flo's sister-in-law, Margaret (Corvelli) Giancini, another second-generation Italian American, came out of a three-week coma resulting from an automobile accident, the holiday menu was the first thing on her mind. Her granddaughter Susan repeated a family story about the event. "On Thanksgiving Day, my mom was sitting there. My grandmother woke up, and she said, 'What is today?' And my mom said, 'Thanksgiving.' And she [my grandmother] said, 'Who is making the pumpkin pie?' So my mom knew she was going to recover."³⁷

As adults, third-generation Italian American brothers Gene, Paul, and Tony Montrone consider Thanksgiving a family favorite. Youngest brother Tony noted, "Well, actually, it's interesting. Christmas was a favorite holiday as a child. As I got older, really the favorite holiday then became Thanksgiving, because that was always the holiday when everybody came back to Scranton--because my parents were

here.”³⁸ Eldest brother Gene went into more detail about how, when growing up, they used to celebrate with the family.

The holidays that I remember the best, that were the most favorite of mine, were Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Between the two of them, we did the same thing for both, and that was go to my maternal grandmother's (Nonni T's) [Settimia's] and join up with my cousins. We would eat, drink, have fun, and, you know, we would play together. We didn't live in exactly the same place, although it was close enough. But that was the time that we got together and played together. We would play in my grandmother's backyard, and we'd play hide and seek, or whatever, in her house. We were freewheeling, because it was holiday season.

Gene also described another time-honored Thanksgiving activity in Scranton: playing and watching high school football. Holding football games on the holiday has been a tradition since at least 1876.³⁹ Gene described it:

In Scranton, Thanksgiving was always the day you played your annual high school football rival. I went to Central [High School], and our football rival was Tech. I would be there playing the trombone in the school band. We always played a morning game. Then we would come home and eat this great Thanksgiving meal. My cousins went to West Scranton [High School]. Their football rival was Dunmore, and they played the afternoon game.⁴⁰

Paul also had fond memories of the Central/Tech football game. He participated as the waterboy, and later the trainer for the Central team. But the real attraction was seeing Sandra perform at half-time as a majorette for Central High School. By senior year, they were going steady.

Throughout their married life, Sandra, a fantastic cook, made Thanksgiving a wonderful family holiday. Her succulent turkey, and especially her stuffing, along with delicious desserts were eagerly anticipated by everyone, and helped launch the Christmas season.

Christmas

Christmas, with both religious and secular components, has long held a place of significance for ethnic Italians. Dating back to the development of Christianity in ancient Rome, the celebration of the birth of the Christ child was incorporated with earlier pagan traditions. Many of these original customs have carried through to modern times and blended with those of other cultures to create common American traditions.

For Roman Catholics, the Christmas season begins four Sundays before December 25 with Advent, a period of preparation for celebrating Christ's birth. Sunday church services during this time include special readings and music selections and the lighting of a candle each week in an Advent wreath.

From home, parishioners often conduct their own countdown to the event using home style wreaths with four candles and Advent calendars. These calendars have

numbered flaps or doors, one for each day from the beginning of Advent through Christmas Eve. One door is opened each day to reveal a surprise treat or little picture.

For years, Sandra has planned well in advance to ensure the people in her life can count down with her, sending Advent calendars to all her family.

For those with an Italian heritage, Christmas Eve is a time of major importance, celebrated with midnight Mass, fasting, and feasting. Settimia (D’Annibale) Giancini assured her Italian boarders, “Holidays will be like always. You will come here Christmas Eve, you will eat Christmas Eve dinner . . . then you will have your bag of goodies to take home.” The tradition of big Christmas Eve meals was carried on by her children, according to her daughter Flo: “When my brothers and sisters had got married, Christmas Eve would be the big fish dinner night. . . They and all their families would come down. . . It was togetherness.”⁴¹

The centerpiece of the celebration was the Feast of the Seven Fishes—which might have seven fish or more or less, depending on the tradition you follow. Most Italian Americans present seven or twelve seafood dishes: seven for the Sacraments or the days of creation, and twelve for the twelve apostles as the twelve days of Christmas.

The Montrone family debates this issue because, as Paul explained, “My brother always said twelve, and most everybody else says seven different fish.”⁴² That brother, Gene, described his viewpoint.

It became a tradition to have twelve kinds of fish. One kind of fish for each of the twelve days of Christmas. . . You want to talk about a challenge, not to me, but to the cook, which was either my wife, or in those days, my grandmother. [It was hard] to be able to get twelve different kinds of fish on the table, that everybody liked, that everybody would eat, and that [people] could eat twelve kinds [of fish] without being over full. So that was their challenge. And, to this day we still do it . . . It’s a count now. My grandchildren will come in and say, “Okay, Gramma. Where are the twelve? Let’s count them.”⁴³

Regardless of the number of fish dishes, the custom has been to serve only seafood. As Marie (G2 – M) (Giancini) Teot said; “In Catholicism, the vigil of a Holy Day was a fish day. . . [Today] everything’s loosened up, but traditionally, the day before a holy day [the Vigil] was always a fish day.”⁴⁴ Some people also make sure to leave a portion on their plates in case the Christ Child visits.

Food was also important for the Gaudenzi’s Christmas holiday traditions, including the seven fishes. In Frank Gaudenzi’s household on Christmas eve, Frank recounted, “On Christmas eve we would have the traditional seven fish. I mean it wasn’t always seven, but smelt were part of it. There was [also] a fish called Baccala, which was like a dried cod fish, and my dad liked it, but a lot of the family didn’t.”

Cookies were also a specialty of many of the Gaudenzi women. Clem (G2 – G) (Gaudenzi) Perugini was famous for her cookies. Her son John said, “Cookies were a big tradition, homemade cookies. Everything was made with

butter. So, you know, we had a lot of foods that everyone enjoyed at the house and my mother was an excellent cook.”⁴⁵ John’s wife, Jane, added:

The first time I saw all those cookies was when my mother-in-law first moved in with us. And I was overwhelmed, I couldn't believe it ... we had like 75 pounds of cookies. She baked for three days. I never saw anything like it. Well, that was her thing. And at Christmastime, she [would make] all these plates for all her friends back home.⁴⁶

John’s cousin Frank Gaudenzi Jr. concurred, “My aunt made the best Italian cookies. . . she always made them for weddings, and for Christmas.”⁴⁷

Christmas Eve for many Americans also calls for setting aside treats for Santa Claus. In Paul and Sandra’s house, Santa’s diet has consisted of milk and sugar cookies and sometimes Sandra’s favorite anisette cookies.⁴⁸

To the Giancini's, Settimia is also remembered as an expert cookie baker. "The cookies she used to bake," recalled Marie, her daughter. "Ohhh! Bushel baskets full of cookies."⁴⁹ Unfortunately, her children had to bear the burden of the Santa Claus legend without much help from the older generation, since the Santa Claus tradition is very American and was not the same for earlier generations who grew up in Italy.

Sometimes the Giancinis received gifts from the boarders hosted by the family, but it was the job of older siblings to play Santa to the youngest. Flo told her younger sister Marie, "You had toys . . . because Mikey [Mario] and I used to buy toys for you. Then we decided we couldn't do it anymore because you were busting our budget." Marie bemoaned, "I was nine. I'll never forget that as long as I live when she told me that year that there was no Santa Claus. . . I thought I would die."⁵⁰

For Marie, Christmas was ordinarily a time of plenty. “Holidays were great. Food was there. The company was there.” Her family, like many Italian American households, spiced up Christmas Eve festivities with games of chance. Usually these were lotto games, such as *tombola* and *noccioli* (see Box 3.4 Lotto=Italian “Bingo”). She recalled:

We’d play cards and bingo. Well, not bingo, lotto. . . When we have our family reunion the last thing of the day is to play lotto. Now the little ones are playing, Mario’s [Dominick’s son] kids and Jamie [Marie’s granddaughter] and all of those. When we were kids and we used to play, we didn’t even have to be told the number because there are certain numbers that have nicknames. We knew what it was because of the nickname. It was great, growing up that way.⁵¹

The following morning, *Natale* (Christmas) itself, Italians and Americans open gifts from each other and from Santa. As a child, Paul’s distant cousin, Emanuela (IT – M) Altimari pondered this phenomenon. “At Christmas I would go crazy trying to understand how it was possible for “Santa

Claus” to get into the house without going through the door, but it was really beautiful opening the presents!!!!”⁵² It should be noted that although in recent years Santa has become more popular in Italy as the deliverer of gifts on Christmas day, La Befana, the old woman who brings gifts on the Epiphany, is still more common.

Annamaria (IT – M) Altomare recalled her grandmother, Anna (IT – M) Battista received some notable Christmas gifts from her American Montrone immigrant Aunt Rachele who, after moving back to Italy, along with her husband, were always invited back to Anna’s home for all the important events, like Christmas. It was a thank you for all they had done for the family during the difficult times in Italy, especially WWII. One time Anna and her siblings also received some gold American coins from Rachele as a present which she had brought back from her time in America.

Although Italians are less likely to put presents under trees than Americans, they do put out stockings to be filled with goodies or candy shaped like coal in their stockings, based on good or bad behavior. However, the one filling the stockings is not Santa Claus, it's an old witch with a broom named *Befana* or *La Vecchia di Natale*. Tradition has it that she regretted not joining the Magi on their journey to Bethlehem, so she wanders the world looking for baby Jesus and giving children treats that she had hoped to give Him.

As with Thanksgiving turkeys, first-generation Italians were often taught about American Christmas trees from their school-aged children. Paul's Aunt Flo told about exchanges she would have with friends.

“Are you having a tree?” [friends would ask]. “No.” . . . And we would feel this [small]. We would go home, and I'd say to Mikey [Mario], “Do you know what? They all are having Christmas trees. Are we having one, Pa?” I said. “I don't think so. We didn't have one last year.” So then we would start up with the trees. We went, and we got a tree about one foot high. We said, “We want to have

a tree.” “But we don’t have the things, the balls you put on there,” my mother said. Well, we have to get some. . . We didn’t have ornaments, but then we got this brilliant idea the day after Christmas they were always on sale. . . So we’d save all our pennies, and we’d go up. I still have ornaments that we bought together . . . and our little ornament that we used to put up. Whoever put it up, the other one had to find it. . . It started from a small tree, then a larger table tree, then a floor tree. Then Dom [Dominick (G2)] used to go in the woods and get these little trees about this high.

Celebrating winter holidays with evergreens harks back to pagan celebrations. Marie noted, though, that Christmas trees are “also patterned after Saint Francis who used to put things on the trees for the birds.”⁵³

Sandra has only the most positive memories of her family’s Christmas activities as a young Gaudenzi girl. She remembered:

Christmastime gave us a wonderful opportunity to visit our expanded family in their homes. We would go to Carbondale to visit Aunt Velia [Velia (G2)], her husband Theodore and their son, Gene. Also we'd go to Southside to see Nonna Mary [Mary (G2)], Aunt Clem, her husband Jack, and son John.

I also recall that my mother would take me to the Globe Store, so I could pick out my choice of a beautiful Madame Alexander doll. The next summer, I would enter the doll contest at our playground, and usually win.⁵⁴

Notwithstanding the food and gifts, Sandra and Paul made sure their family did not forget that Christmas was about the birth of Jesus, our savior, and their family had traditions that kept the true spirit of Christmas at the forefront of everyone's minds, including a religious procession in their home.

Box 5.3: Christmas with Paul and Sandra

For Roman Catholics, the Christmas season does not end until the Feast of the Epiphany, the January 6 observance of the Three Wise Men visiting Jesus' manger. Traditionally, rather than Christmas day, the Epiphany is the main day for gift giving in Italy. According to this tradition, Christmas decorations, including the tree, should not be taken down until that time, when an Italian version of Santa bearing gifts is scheduled to visit, an analogy to the gold, frankincense & myrrh brought by the three wise men.

Beatrice (Giancini) Montrone tried to some extent to keep the gift giving tradition of the Epiphany alive by having her family hang their Christmas stockings on the eve of the Epiphany. Tony recalled:

We would wake up in the morning of January 6th, and Befana and the Magi would have come. There was definitely a certain level of excitement as we tried to continue Christmas. The tree would come down that day. Unfortunately, as all of us got older and with January 6th more often than not being a school and workday, the

excitement got condensed into a few minutes of trying to get everyone together and the custom just faded away.”⁵⁵

New Year's Eve and Day

As an Italian proverb suggests, *Anno nuovo vita nuova* (“The new year calls for a new way of life”). In that spirit, the Italian New Year’s Eve involves a celebration of *La Festa di San Silvestro* (the Feast of Saint Sylvester), the pope who “[closed] the door on one year and its pagan ceremonies and [opened] it on a new one in a Christian era.”⁵⁶

Box 5.4: New Year’s Celebration in Rome and the Vatican

To symbolize readiness to change and let go of past unhappiness, the old Italian tradition is to throw old or unused items (especially crockery) out the window at midnight. It helped that the noise of smashing pottery added to that of fireworks, bell ringing, and cheering, all part of an

effort to chase off malevolent spirits before the start of the new year.⁵⁷

Paul and Sandra’s family has performed a modified version of the Italian noisy tradition over the years. Sandra described it:

We tried fireworks a few times, but that proved to be dangerous. So now we bring out all kinds of percussion instruments and hats. Kids-sized cymbals, little drums, and shakers, and everybody gets noisemakers. We hit [them], shake them, and everybody clangs away. It’s cute. It’s very cute.⁵⁸

Like most Americans, Paul and Sandra’s family has celebrated New Year’s Eve by watching festivities and enjoying time together. As Sandra described the pleasant scene, “We go downstairs to the TV room, we have champagne and noise makers, and we celebrate. Anyone from the family is welcome to join us.” Referencing that feeling of global and national connectedness that TV can

sometimes provide, Paul added, “We’re watching all the different celebrations around the world, and our country, including Times Square.”⁵⁹

In the Italian tradition, of course, one cannot celebrate without eating. And for some unknown reason, the conclusion of the New Year’s Eve celebration in multiple generations of the Montrone family has always included a nice helping of sausage on wonderful Italian bread. Then all the participants would head to bed being careful not to burp.⁶⁰

Birthdays

Italians have not always dedicated much effort to celebrating birthdays. The Giancini’s distant cousin, Bruno Colapietro, in fact, joked, “I didn’t know you could celebrate your birthday every year.”⁶¹ However, some lucky individuals had two birthday celebrations a year, one on the day of birth and another on the day of the saint for whom he or she was named. Sometimes a birthday would be celebrated by

pulling the ear of the birthday boy or girl, one pull for each year of life, a custom thought to bring good luck.

Some of the older generation family members did not celebrate birthdays as children but did so later in life. Paul's 1st cousin once removed, Anna (IT – M) Battista (born in Italy in 1920), could not celebrate her birthday when she was young because her family was “still in a period of mourning.” It wasn't until adulthood that her children began celebrating with her.⁶²

Beatrice (Giancini) Montrone (born in Italy in 1912) wrote in her memory book that she didn't remember any birthday party given for her as a child:

As Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would say “We just grewed.” We had plenty of food, moderate amount of clothes, huge dinners (especially [for] holidays), but individual parties were not a necessity. We would be told, “To-day is your birthday. You are such and such years old.”⁶³

The minimal nature of these past observances did not stop Beatrice’s family from hosting huge bashes for her later milestone birthdays, every five years as she turned 85 through 100. Even as old as 95, “[S]he did dance and sing along with Italian musicians!”⁶⁴

Her younger sister Flo (born in America in 1922) remembered celebrating her birthdays with her family rather than friends when growing up. “It would be a family thing. . . My mother would make what you liked . . . and a cake. . . And that was it—when she was able [and] if things went okay. But if the budget suffered, well, then we’ll make it next Sunday. ”⁶⁵ Their youngest sister, Marie (born in America in 1931), continues to celebrate with family and friends. Her 80th birthday involved no fewer than *three* separate events.⁶⁶

The children of the aforementioned matriarchs both in America and in Italy expanded the tradition consistently

celebrating birthdays in a big way. In Italy, Annamaria Altomare, daughter of Cleonice (born in Italy in 1954), said that for her mother’s birthday, “Usually there is a big lunch . . . all together . . . with a cake for [the] birthday and with the presents and, before, with the family, [and] now . . . with her children, who organize something for her. ”⁶⁷

The Italian Americans of that generation did the same. Angelo and Beatrice Montrone’s three sons and daughter-in-law, Sandra, celebrated birthdays every year when growing up.⁶⁸

Sandra continued and elevated the birthday celebrations even further in her family. Aside from the special decorations and gifts, she would take the time to make a homemade birthday cake flavored especially to the preferred taste of the celebrant. For example, her cake for her husband, Paul, includes all his favorite flavors; vanilla, coconut, lemon, whipped cream, etc. For a milestone birthday, like a 50th, Paul would add a video, created from a

compilation of family videos, celebrating the life of the birthday recipient.

Box 5.5: Nonni T's Birthday

Festivals

Beyond holidays and other family celebrations for Italians and Italian Americans, the calendar is packed with numerous other occasions called festivals, or feste, dedicated to specific patron saints. The participants customarily eat and drink specialties associated with the saint being feted. There might be processions—with a statue of the saint—a special Mass, and other activities.

Near Scranton, in Jessup, Pennsylvania, the original home of Francesco and Mary Gaudenzi, not one but three saints are still celebrated on the weekend nearest St. Ubaldo's feast day, May 15. Jessup's famous La Corsa dei Ceri (Race of the Saints) mainly honors St. Ubaldo (patron saint of masons) but also St. George (patron saint of merchants) and St.

Anthony (patron saint of farmers). Each of three teams of ten carries a statue of a saint throughout the town—but of course St. Ubaldo will always win, followed by St. George, and finally St. Anthony. This merriment has been enacted (barring two breaks) in Jessup since 1909 when immigrants from Gubbio in Perugia, Italy, began participating, as they had back home.⁶⁹

June 13 is the feast day of St. Anthony of Padua, patron of lost objects (among other things). St. Anthony is celebrated in Endicott, New York, and other areas in and around Syracuse, the weekend before his feast day.

According to Festa, a book about Italian holidays, during the early years of the twentieth century, the festival of St. Anthony had become so big in some upstate New York communities that it typically drew more crowds than even the county fair.⁷⁰

In Pittston, another Scranton neighboring town, there has been a procession in honor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (the Blessed Virgin Mary, patroness of the Carmelite Order) since at least the 1950s. On her feast day, July 16 (or thereabouts), her statue is carried through town while observers attach money.⁷¹

St. Ann's Day, July 26, has been especially celebrated by the Montrone / Giancini families since settling in Scranton. It takes place at the Monastery and Basilica in West Scranton dedicated to St Ann, the mother of the blessed Virgin Mary.

Box 5.6: St. Ann's Day

The idea of great festivities may have begun regionally in Italy, but they have brought Italian Americans from all regions together as an ethnic group. Some have veered away from the religious element, in that many modern-day

festivals celebrate Italian culture more than any specific saint.

One such citywide celebration, *La Festa Italiana*, has annually taken place in Scranton, Pennsylvania, since at least 1976.⁷² Conceived to maintain the community's large Italian populations' traditions, it is a 4-day celebration of culture, cuisine and music held over Labor Day weekend in Courthouse Square ... chosen for its resemblance to an Italian piazza, or plaza.⁷³

Perpetuating Traditions

Even with assimilation into American culture over several generations, members of the Montrone and Gaudenzi families have successfully passed along important traditions and all manner of celebrations described in this chapter. Paul attributes his family's success in maintaining this important continuity to his wife, Sandra. Looking ahead to future generations, he says, "They're going to have experienced wonderful traditions. Sandra and I hope is that

our children, grandchildren, and all future generations will continue to observe traditions in the manner of their ancestors, while also adapting and adding to the celebrations in their own manner.”⁷⁴

¹ Helen (Montrone) Mastro, daughter of Antonio Montrone, interview by Brian O’Connell, 25 July 1995, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

² Eugene Montrone, grandson of Antonio Montrone, interview by Rhonda McClure, 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

³ Paul Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 30 January 2014, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

⁴ Anthony Montrone, interview by Rhonda McClure, 24 July 2011, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

⁵ Natalie Ann Cavagnaro, daughter of Joseph Cavagnaro, interview by Brian O’Connell, transcribed 1997, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

⁶ The word carnival comes from the Latin *carne* (meat) and *vale* (farewell). Lori Granieri, *Italian-American Holiday Traditions: Celebrations and Family Entertainment* (New York: Citadel Press, 2002), 186.

⁷ Geraldine (Gaudenzi) Colizzo, granddaughter of Mary (Cavagnaro) Gaudenzi, interview by Mary Tedesco, 12 February 2014, transcript held by Paul Montrone, and as further relayed by Geraldine on 9 November 2018. Fretella recipe [insert] held by Geraldine Colizzo.

⁸ Beatrice (Giancini) Montrone, granddaughter of Giovanni Battista Francesco D’Annibale, interview by Brian O’Connell, undated, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

⁹ Paul and Sandra (Gaudenzi) Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 23 March 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

¹⁰ Frances M. Malpezzi and William M. Clements, *Italian-American Folklore* (Atlanta: August House, Inc., 1992), 90-91. The procession is meant “to depict the mother’s mournful search for her lost, now-dead son.”

¹¹ “Storica Processione del Venerdi Santo,” Il sito ufficiale Citta di Gualdo Tadino, online at http://www.tadino.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=34&Itemid=55.

¹² Paul and Sandra (Gaudenzi) Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 23 March 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

¹³ *Pigna* is a cone-shaped bread popular in the Molise region, and *colomba* is a dove-shaped bread similar to *panettone*. The region of Marche celebrates with *crescia di pasqua*, a bread made with a lot of eggs and cheese. *Crescia al formaggio* is a popular dish in Umbria “made with a rich briochelike dough and baked in a flowerpot.” Using eggs, spinach, and ricotta, Ligurians make a *torta pasqualina*. Since its invention in Naples, *pasteria*, a ricotta-filled cake scented with orange blossom, has become the popular Easter dish in the Campania region, and *fiadone* resembles a cheese cake, pie, or torte. Lori Granieri, *Italian-American Holiday Traditions: Celebrations and Family Entertainment* (New York: Citadel Press, 2002), 186-188.

¹⁴ Paul and Sandra (Gaudenzi) Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 23 March 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

¹⁵ As relayed by Tony Montrone (Paul Montrone’s brother) on 26 January 2019.

¹⁶ “Festa della Madonna di Monte Camera,” Il sito ufficiale Citta di Gualdo Tadino, online at http://www.tadino.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=486&Itemid=152.

¹⁷ Paul and Sandra (Gaudenzi) Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 23 March 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

¹⁸ As relayed by Tony Montrone (Paul Montrone’s brother) on 26 January 2019.

¹⁹ Paul and Sandra (Gaudenzi) Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 23 March 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

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- ²⁰ Paul Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 30 January 2014, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ²¹ Eugene Montrone, grandson of Antonio Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 13 January 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ²² Eugene Montrone, grandson of Antonio Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 13 January 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ²³ Natalie Ann Cavagnaro, daughter of Joseph Cavagnaro, interview by Brian O’Connell, transcribed 1997, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ²⁴ Natalie Ann Cavagnaro, daughter of Joseph Cavagnaro, interview by Brian O’Connell, transcribed 1997, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ²⁵ Helen (Montrone) Mastro, daughter of Antonio Montrone, interview by Brian O’Connell, 25 July 1995, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ²⁶ Eugene Montrone, grandson of Antonio Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 13 January 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ²⁷ Website of Northeastern Pennsylvania’s Annual Steamtown Marathon, online at <http://www.steamtownmarathon.com/>.
- ²⁸ Vincenza Scarpaci, *The Journey of the Italians in America* (Gretna, Louisiana, Pelican Pub. Co., 2008), 257.
- ²⁹ As related by Paul Montrone 14 October 2021.
- ³⁰ “UNICO campaigns for Italian heritage month,” *Times Leader*, 17 October 2010 (http://archives.timesleader.com/2010_14/2010_10_17_UNICO_campaigns_for_Italian_heritage_month_-_Scranton.html#ixzz2t2zbHN2y). According to the article, Scranton has the largest chapter in the country, and UNICO as a whole is the self-proclaimed “largest Italian-American service organization in the country.”
- ³¹ U.S. House of Representatives, “Bill Text: 106th Congress (1999-2000), H.Res.347.IH,” *Library of Congress, THOMAS* (<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?c106:1:/temp/~c106Zqw3lB::>).
- ³² “October to become Italian and Italian American Heritage Month?” Bloomfield Life, 4 August 2011, online at (http://www.northjersey.com/community/announcements/126748128_October_to_become_Italian_American_Heritage_Month_.html).
- ³³ Barack Obama, “Presidential Proclamation--Italian American Heritage and Culture Month,” *The White House*, 14 October 2010 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/10/14/presidential-proclamation-italian-american-heritage-and-culture-month>); “A Petition for October,” *UNICO Italian & Italian American Heritage Calendar* (http://www.unicocalendar.org/whats_new_1.html); U.S. Congress, “Bill Text 111th Congress (2009-2010), H.RES>1705.IH” and “Bill Text: 112th Congress (2011-2012), H.Res.367.IH and S.RES.301,” *Library of Congress, THOMAS* (<http://thomas.loc.gov/>).
- ³⁴ Abraham Lincoln, “President Abraham Lincoln’s Thanksgiving Day Proclamation of October 3, 1863 (Presidential Proclamation 106), 10/03/1863-10/03/1863,” Presidential Proclamations, 1791-2011, Record Group 11 (General Records of the United States Government, 1778-2006) (Washington, D.C.: National Archives); online at (<http://research.archives.gov/description/299960>).
- ³⁵ U.S. House of Representatives, “The House Joint Resolution Making the Last Thursday in November a Legal Holiday, 12/26/41,” 77th Congress, Record Group 233 (Records of the U.S. House of Representatives) (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, Center for Legislative Archives), online at (<http://www.archives.gov/press/press-releases/2012/nr12-29.html>);
- ³⁶ Fausta (Giancini) D’Annibale, daughter of Settimia (D’Annibale) Giancini, interview by Brian O’Connell, transcribed between 10 December 1996 and 21 April 1997, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ³⁷ Susan Johnston, granddaughter of Margaret (Corvelli) Giancini, interview by Rhonda McClure, 24 July 2011, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ³⁸ Tony Montrone, interview by Rhonda McClure, 24 July 2011, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ³⁹ “Teacher’s Guide Primary Source Set: Thanksgiving,” Teaching with Primary Sources, Library of Congress, online at (<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/thanksgiving/>).
- ⁴⁰ Eugene Montrone, grandson of Antonio Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 13 January 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁴¹ Fausta (Giancini) D’Annibale, daughter of Eugenio Giancini, interview by Rhonda McClure, 23 July 2011, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁴² Paul Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 30 January 2014, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁴³ Eugene Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 13 January 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

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- ⁴⁴ Paul and Sandra (Gaudenzi) Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 12 October 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁴⁵ John Perugini, interview by Karen Keyes, 19 January 2017, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁴⁶ Jane Perugini, interview by Karen Keyes, 11 September 2018, transcript held by Paul Montrone
- ⁴⁷ Frank Gaudenzi, Jr., interview by Karen Keyes 1 September 2016, transcript held by Paul Montrone
- ⁴⁸ Paul and Sandra (Gaudenzi) Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 12 October 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁴⁹ Marie (Giancini) Teot, daughter of Settimia (D’Annibale) Giancini, interview by Brian O’Connell, transcribed between 10 December 1996 and 21 April 1997, transcript held by Paul Montrone. It was typical in Italian American households for the women to get together for a full day dedicated to baking cookies and other treats. Other Italian sweets popular during this holiday season include: *strufoli* (“honey pastry balls from Naples), *mostaciolli* (“cinnamon bread biscuits with chocolate from Rome), *pandolce* (“a butter cake” with “dried fruit and nuts” popular in Genoa), *sfogliatelle* (“flaky pastries stuffed with ricotta and candied peel” from Campania), and *cicerchiata* (“balls of pasta fried and covered in honey and frappé” from Marche). Lori Granieri, *Italian-American Holiday Traditions: Celebrations and Family Entertainment* (New York: Citadel Press, 2002), 119 and 132.
- ⁵⁰ Fausta (Giancini) D’Annibale and Marie (Giancini) Teot, daughters of Settimia (D’Annibale) Giancini, interview by Brian O’Connell, transcribed between 10 December 1996 and 21 April 1997, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁵¹ Marie (Giancini) Teot, daughter of Settimia (D’Annibale) Giancini, interview by Brian O’Connell, transcribed between 10 December 1996 and 21 April 1997, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁵² Emanuela (Lalia) Altimare, granddaughter of Luigi and Erminia (D’Annibale) Fratangeli, response to interview questions provided by Rhonda McClure, English translation held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁵³ Fausta (Giancini) D’Annibale and Marie (Giancini) Teot, daughters of Settimia (D’Annibale) Giancini, interview by Brian O’Connell, transcribed between 10 December 1996 and 21 April 1997, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁵⁴ As related by Sandra Montrone 10 November 2021
- ⁵⁵ As relayed by Tony Montrone (Paul Montrone’s brother) on 26 January 2019.
- ⁵⁶ Lori Granieri, *Italian-American Holiday Traditions: Celebrations and Family Entertainment* (New York: Citadel Press, 2002), 7 and 145; Helen Barolini, *Festa: Recipes and Recollections of Italian Holidays* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 81. San Silvestro “was pope from A.D. 324 to 335, during the reign of Constantine, who effected the turning point in Christianity by giving it legality.”
- ⁵⁷ This section was drawn from information in: Helen Barolini, *Festa: Recipes and Recollections of Italian Holidays* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Lori Granieri, *Italian-American Holiday Traditions: Celebrations and Family Entertainment* (New York: Citadel Press, 2002); and Frances M. Malpezzi and William M. Clements, *Italian-American Folklore* (Atlanta: August House, Inc., 1992).
- ⁵⁸ Paul and Sandra (Gaudenzi) Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 12 October 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁵⁹ Paul and Sandra (Gaudenzi) Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 12 October 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁶⁰ As relayed by Paul Montrone 20 April 2019.
- ⁶¹ Bruno Colapietro, son of Francesco Felice and Vincenza (Ricci) Colapietro, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 23 July 2011, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁶² Anna (Buontempo) Battista, niece of Antonio Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 2 October 2011, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁶³ *My Memories: A Written Record of My Life and Times to Hand Down to My Family* (Metropolitan Museum of Art); completed by Beatrice M. Giancini Montrone in 1985, held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁶⁴ Sylvia (Ware) Montrone, Bea’s History, written as Beatrice (Giancini) Montrone’s introduction for the Elmcroft Staff.
- ⁶⁵ Fausta (Giancini) D’Annibale, daughter of Eugenio Giancini, interview by Rhonda McClure, 23 July 2011, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁶⁶ Marie (Giancini) Teot, daughter of Eugenio Giancini, interview by Rhonda McClure, 23 July 2011, transcript held by Paul Montrone.
- ⁶⁷ Cleonice (Battista) Altomare, daughter of Anna (Buontempo) Battista, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, July 2011, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

⁶⁸ Anthony Montrone, interview by Rhonda McClure, 24/25 July 2011, transcript held by Paul Montrone; Eugene Montrone, grandson of Antonio Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 13 January 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone; Paul and Sandra (Gaudenzi) Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 23 March 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone; Paul Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 30 January 2014, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

⁶⁹ “La festa dei Ceri,” website of St. Ubaldo Day, online at <http://www.stubaldoday.com/WhoWeAre/History/tabid/108/Default.aspx>; Frances M. Malpezzi and William M. Clements, *Italian-American Folklore* (Atlanta: August House, Inc., 1992), 105.

⁷⁰ Helen Barolini, *Festa: Recipes and Recollections of Italian Holidays* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 230-231.

⁷¹ Stephanie Longo, *Images of America: Italians of Northeastern Pennsylvania* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 94-95.

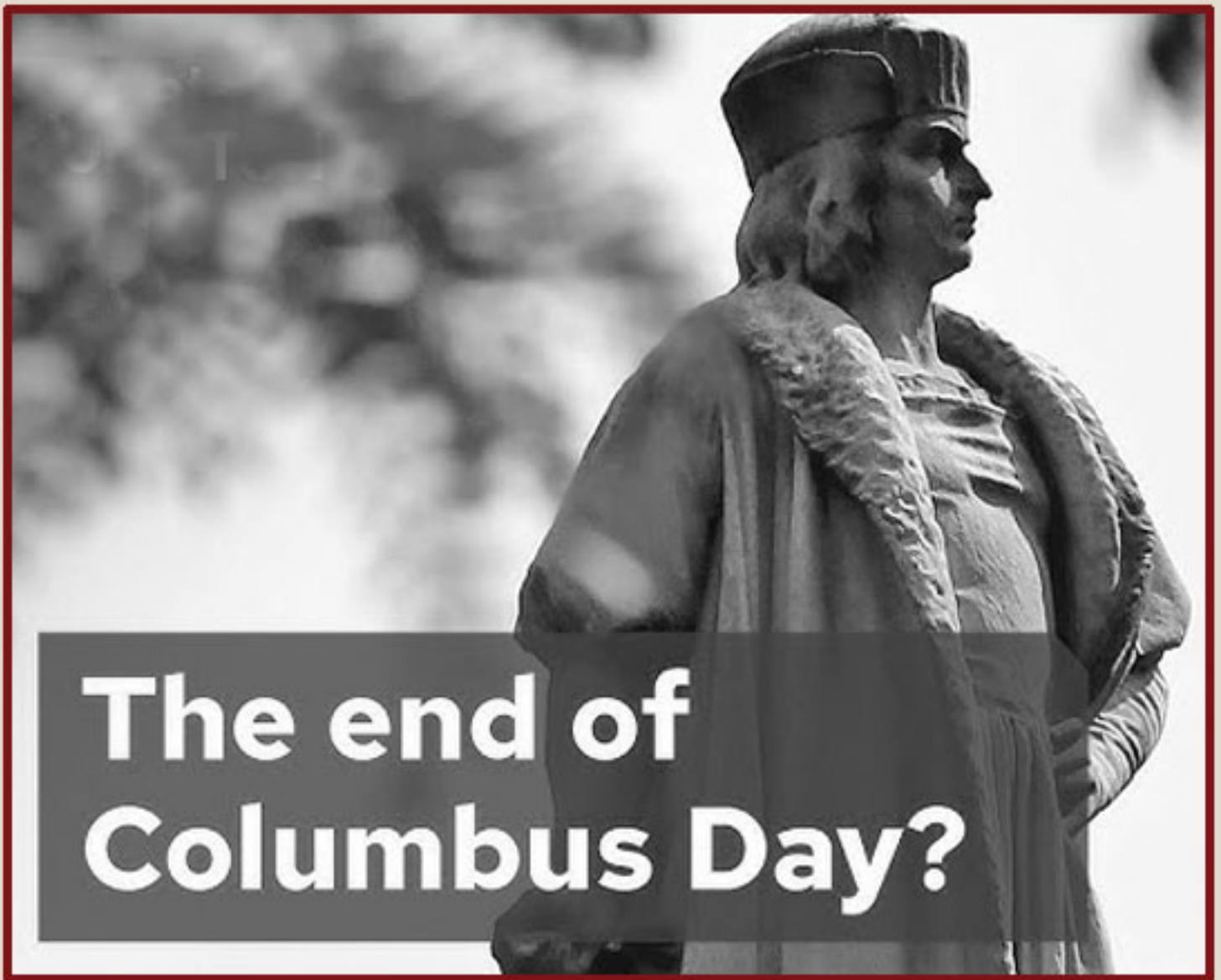
⁷² Website of La Festa Italiana, online at <http://lafestaitaliana.org/>; Stephanie Longo, *Images of America: Italians of Northeastern Pennsylvania* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 99-102. *La Festa Italiana* began in the 1930s but did not last. It was held on Columbus Day weekend until 1981.

⁷³ <http://lafestaitaliana.org/home/history/>

⁷⁴ Paul and Sandra (Gaudenzi) Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 12 October 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

Box 5.1

COLUMBUS DAY



The history of Columbus Day

Box 5.1

The Columbus Day Holiday

The United States began periodically celebrating the anniversary of Columbus's arrival on our continent early in the history of the nation. But unofficial Italian American celebrations began in select cities as early as 1792 when the Columbian Order of New York (better known as Tamany Hall) commemorated the 300th anniversary of Columbus's historic landing.¹

Columbus Day was first instituted as a national holiday by President Benjamin Harrison in 1892, as an apology in response to the lynching of 11 innocent Italian immigrants in New Orleans². They were accused of murdering the police chief, but they were found innocent by a jury. Nonetheless, the “Crescent City Hangings” were considered the largest lynchings in the United States' history. The holiday was named after Christopher Columbus, not to honor him, but

because coincidentally 1892 was the 400th anniversary of his arrival in what became the Americas. The lynchings were a black mark in our country's history but this has been forgotten in modern times.

The first state celebration took place in Colorado in 1907, but only in 1934 was it designated as a permanent federal holiday by President Franklin Roosevelt. And later still, in 1971, due in part to the Uniform Monday Holiday Act and campaigning efforts by Scranton native Neil C. Trama, Columbus Day became a fixed national holiday to be celebrated on the second Monday in October.³

Over time, through parades and festivities, Columbus Day evolved across the country as a holiday to commemorate the legacy of Italian-Americans in our nation. It is really the only holiday that recognizes the hard work and contributions of the broad range of immigrants and their descendants towards the ideals and progress of America.

In spite of the history of this holiday, in recent years attacks on Columbus monuments and Columbus Day itself have arisen. Author Camille Paglia (Paul Montrone's distant cousin) commented on the attack on Columbus by indigenous people and their supporters at the turn of the millennium.

My family and I were incensed at the Syracuse vandalism [in 1992] because the beautiful Columbus monument and fountain were donated by local Italian-Americans in 1935 to serve as the hub of the grand plaza facing the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. We whose impoverished forebears emigrated to the U.S. between the 1880s and the 1930s are not, in our view, responsible for earlier injustices done to Indians or blacks.⁴

In many cities and states around the country, Columbus Day has been eliminated entirely, or replaced with Indigenous People's Day following the tide of backlash against the explorer. This is due to misconceptions and distortions of his actions during the time period in which he lived that do not sit well with the sentiments of some of today's political left.

New Hampshire had success in stemming this backlash during the 2024 legislative session by passing a law stating that NH schools and towns must refer to state designated holidays (which includes Columbus Day) by their legal name. With this new law in effect, the towns and cities that had eliminated Columbus Day are now required to restore the holiday back to their city and school calendars.

Columbus Day celebrations, in all their variety, primarily demonstrate patriotism and pride in the United States by our current citizens, while still showing respect for the sacrifices of their Italian ancestors. In addition, Americans with ancestors from all provinces in Italy join together for this holiday. *Campanilismo* is set aside in favor of a general ethnic celebration.

¹ <https://www.history.com/topics/holidays/columbus-day>

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/10/13/columbus-day-holiday-accident-history/>

³ Dan Fletcher, “A Brief History of Columbus Day,” *TIME*, 12 October 2009

(<http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1929666,00.html#ixzz2t2rpH0oT>); “UNICO campaigns for Italian heritage month,” *Times Leader*, 17 October 2010

(http://archives.timesleader.com/2010_14/2010_10_17_UNICO_campaigns_for_Italian_heritage_month_-_Scranton.html#ixzz2t2zbHN2y); Stephanie Longo, *Images of America: Italians of Northeastern Pennsylvania*

(Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 108; Josh McAuliffe, “County Columbus Day Association

gears up for annual dinner Sunday at Fiorelli's in Peckville," *Times-Tribune*, 3 October 2011, online at (<http://thetimes-tribune.com/lifestyles/county-columbus-day-association-gears-up-for-annual-dinner-sunday-at-fiorelli-s-in-peckville-1.1211414>); Barack Obama, "Presidential Proclamation – Columbus Day, 2013," *The White House*, 11 October 2013 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/10/11/presidential-proclamation-columbus-day-2013>). Lobbying by the Knights of Columbus, a Roman Catholic fraternal order, resulted in Congress passing a joint resolution on 30 April 1934, prompting annual Presidential proclamations to establish Columbus Day.

⁴ Camille Paglia, "Columbus and the march for Italian pride," *Salon*, 25 October 2000 (<http://www.salon.com/2000/10/25/columbus/>); Entry for Lidia Colapietro, 5, on S.S. *Conte Biancamano*, List 16, 5 December 1930; Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957, microfilm publication T715, roll 4881 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives). Camille's mother Lydia (Colapietro) Paglia immigrated from Ceccano, Italy to Endicott, New York, aboard the S.S. *Conte Biancamano*, sailing from Naples to New York in November 1930. Their family is distantly related to Beatrice (Giancini) Montrone's family, who made a similar journey ten years earlier.

Box 5.2

AMERIGO VESPUCCI, AMERICA'S NAMESAKE



Box 5.2

Amerigo Vespucci, America's Namesake

As previous history undergoes transformation by modern 'experts' regarding Christopher Columbus and his 'discovery' of America, the Italians have another reason to be proud. The Americas were named after Amerigo Vespucci, an Italian explorer, who lived around the same time as Columbus.

By now history has shown that the Vikings landed in America as early as 1,000 AD¹, long before Columbus set sail in 1492, 'discovering' not America but the Central American Islands and Caribbean.

Although it is unclear as to whether Vespucci made two or four voyages to this new world, it is fairly certain that the first was as navigator of a four-ship expedition on behalf of Spain. During this voyage, he is said to have reached Guyana, South America, then headed south where he found

the mouth of the Amazon River and from there travelled even further south to Cape St. Augustine.

Vespucci thought he was sailing along the southeasterly peninsula of Asia so upon his return to Spain he immediately outfitted another expedition with the intent of returning for further exploration. This time around, the Spanish government did not want to fund Vespucci's travels, so in 1501, he set sail under the flag of Portugal.

He once again reached the coast of Brazil near St. Augustine and may have been the first European to sight Rio de la Plata. Much of this trip is unknown including its return route which some believe followed a south to north passage along the coast of North America. Nonetheless, Vespucci had made his mark.

In 1507, the name 'America' was first used in print by a German cartographer using Vespucci's travel letters and

simple sketches, as his guide to map the new world.² Thus, Vespucci's legacy was fueled by a map that he did not draw.

The story behind the naming goes as follows:

In a small town named St-Die-des-Vosges in the Meurthe Valley in France, two European humanists came together to produce an extraordinary map that differed radically from those before it. Prior to this map, Europeans believed that the world consisted of three land masses – Africa, Asia and Europe. The new map depicted a fourth part of the world for the first time – the map makers named that place America after Amerigo Vespucci's discovery. The map is known as the Waldseemuller map named after the German cartographer who drew it.

The author of the map, Waldseemuller, wrote “These parts [talking about Asia and Africa] have in fact now been more widely explored, and a fourth part has been discovered by Amerigo Vespucci. Since both Asia and Africa received their names from women, I do not see why anyone should rightly prevent this [new part] from being called Amerigen – the land of Amerigo, as it were –

or America, after its discoverer, Americus, a man of perceptive character. Waldseemuller called it America instead of Americus to feminize it as ships and continents were always female.³

So although it is uncertain whether Vespucci ever landed in, or explored, any part of North America, he was the first to recognize that North and South America were distinct continents and not a part of Asia as believed by previous explorers. As a result, he received extraordinary credit for his efforts and our continent permanently bears his name.

¹ <http://www.history.com/topics/exploration/amerigo-vespucci>

² <http://www.history.com/topics/exploration/amerigo-vespucci>

³ <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20180702-the-epic-story-of-the-map-that-gave-america-its-name>, and <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-waldseemuller-map-charting-the-new-world-148815355/>

Box 5.3

CHRISTMAS WITH PAUL AND SANDRA



Box 5.3

Christmas with Paul and Sandra

To Paul and Sandra, Christmas has been a special time from both a religious and family perspective. When this special time of year arrives, they celebrate with a blend of inherited and newly established traditions. They get satisfaction in both preserving valued links with the past and in adapting as the family grows and times change.

Besides the family tradition, since early in their marriage living in New York City, then Arlington, VA (Washington, D.C.), Montclair, NJ, and ultimately New Hampshire, Paul and Sandra have always made time to celebrate with friends and neighbors as well as their family.

The first year they moved into their old English Tudor home in Montclair, NJ, they decided to have a neighborhood party and utilize the large fireplace in their living room. They remembered that bonfires used to burn a Yule Log were

traditions meant to scare away any evil spirits and banish negative aspects of the past. So they decided to work one into their Christmas celebration, with unfortunate results. Paul relates the incident:

“You know what we’ll do, Sandra, we’ll take this decaying white birch log [from the backyard of their NJ home] for Christmas, and we will make our first yule log for our Christmas party.” But it didn’t fit in the fireplace; it was too long. So I stuck it in the fireplace, and let it come out into the living room. . . on party night I got the yule log in there, and we started it. It was blazing, it was beautiful, and everyone was enjoying themselves.

Then because the old fireplace was designed to put heat into the living room, and the log was really dry--it started super heating up the room . . . People couldn’t stay in that room, [it] was so hot. Now there’s nobody in the room, and this log is burning. . . I had to run in and out every now and then and push the log into the fireplace to keep the fire from coming into the living room and burning the house down. Anyway, we finally got through that.

The next morning, we saw the furniture, this new furniture that Sandra had bought, the wood finish had all boiled. We had cooked the finish off the furniture. That was an early learning experience for [us and the] fireplace, but it did add a festive element to Christmas and was especially memorable.¹

Here in their own words from 2013, are some of the ways the family has celebrated Christmas in more recent times.²

Getting Ready

Paul: Christmas is such a big deal here . . . I mean, our children and grandchildren have celebrated every Christmas with us. . . Sandra is buying gifts all the time; she accumulates gifts. . . Sandra starts working on Christmas right after Labor Day. That's how much of a Christmas person she is. Well before Christmas there are Advent calendars. . . She ships out Advent calendars to our children and grandchildren right after Thanksgiving. She searches for them all year.

Sandra: You want to hear something funny? When I taught CCD (religious instruction to kids), because I wanted my kids to learn about Advent, getting ready for Jesus, I had them make the Advent calendars. [Each one], was felt so that it would stick, and then they would add a candle.

It's like the Christmas cards. I like to give people things that mean something to them. . . Oh yes, there's always music. After Thanksgiving, the Christmas music begins and we play it almost every day.

As Christmas draws closer, I plan so that everybody has their own-colored wrapping paper for their gifts.

Paul: Oh, their wrapping paper. Their own wrapping paper.

Sandra: So on Christmas day they know whose gift pile is here, whose pile is there.

Paul: That all takes place before anybody shows up: all the gifts, all the wrapping. . . Everything is all done, and stored well before Christmas, including the Christmas stockings. . .

Sandra: I made the stockings myself for many years. And they're big. I'm not making them anymore, obviously, and there's a woman who made [some more of] them for our new grandchildren. When you have stockings that are knitted, they get bigger and bigger as you add gifts. So she put a fabric liner inside so they only grow so big. She was great. She was my salvation. And so, we have stockings that are "hung by the chimney with care."

Christmas Eve

Paul: Christmas Eve always starts with the whole family attending the Christmas Vigil Mass. Then, we have a dinner. Now, for years we had it here [main house], but in recent years we've been going out to dinner. The group is too big now and the need to prepare for Christmas dinner the next day would be overwhelming. So we go out [and] even when we go to the restaurant, we make sure they have seven fish [the number seems to vary among Italian families -- 7 – 9 – 11 – 12, why 7?, it could stand for the number of days it took Mary & Joseph to travel to

Bethlehem, the 7 sacraments, the 7 deadly sins...who knows].

Sandra: Because the day before Christmas, you can't have meat. So it has to be fish.

Paul: Yes. It's a vigil. . . Traditionally the day before a holy day was always a fish day. Then we come home.

Sandra: After that [our son] Jerome's little boys are [whispering], "Do we open our boxes under the tree?" Because they know that's the beginning of Christmas, too. So sweet. The boxes contain their Christmas pajamas, a festive red set that everyone wears. Then everybody goes to their rooms and puts them on.

Paul: Then comes the procession.

Sandra: The gifts are fun, but in every room, I have a crèche. I have been decorating with crèches ever since the kids came along. . . because they have to know that Christmas is not about the presents. The crèche symbolizes what Christmas is really about.

Paul: My wife has always loved crèches. And, over the years she keeps accumulating, so now we have eight crèches, or more.

Sandra: At least. I bought the [first] one when we were in Washington. This was the beginning, and [we didn't have] a lot of money. But there was this beautiful crèche. And it was on sale. It was meant to be. We have a ceremony Christmas Eve. . . We take Jesus out of each of the crèches, and they are all brought back into our kitchen to organize a procession.

Paul: We have a procession with the grandchildren. . . [our son] Angelo's playing "Away in a Manger" on the piano. The lights are turned off and the little ones are carrying candles and little crèche Jesuses around the house starting in the kitchen. It's a cute little ceremony. . . each little Jesus is placed in its proper crèche.

Sandra: After the procession we open the gifts under the Christmas tree. They are family gifts, *not* Santa Claus gifts. Because Christmas [Day] is reserved for Santa. . .

Paul: Then comes reading "The Night Before Christmas."

Sandra: We call Paul, Papa. It's such a beautiful tradition. Paul reads it to the grandchildren. And there are always some new Santa believers in the

group. You should see the grandchildren, all gathered around. . . all over the back of the couch. . . And they love it – seeing the pictures and hearing about what happened. Paul has used the same book for decades.

Paul: Then after “The Night Before Christmas,” they all have to go to bed because Santa may be coming. . .

Sandra: We also have to put [out] the cookies for Santa. And the note. . . So they do the note. [Santa gets] sugar cookies. We also make anisette cookies. They’re my favorite. [and we] must have milk. Milk and cookies, and then everybody goes to bed.

Paul: Then quietly the adults bring all the gifts down to the Monet garden house.

Sandra: So, as Paul said, after the kids go to bed, we have this massive hauling of gifts down to get set up for Christmas morning. We used to have Christmas day in our main house. We have outgrown our main house because there are so many [children and grandchildren]. . . Now we have it in the Monet garden house and it is wonderful, full of toys and excitement. . . The kids call it their “Christmas

House.” And the stockings have to be filled because they get hung by the chimney with care. . . I mean it’s a whole procedure.

Paul: [We have stockings for] everybody. And [you] can never touch or look at your own gifts or your own stockings. Somebody else has to do that. . . We clear the whole room of furniture. . . to make room for the toys.

Christmas Day

Paul: On Christmas morning, the whole family goes together to the Christmas House. A few adults sneak in just before the crowd, so they can catch the faces of the young kids on ‘camera’ rushing in to find their “Santa” gifts.

Sandra: There is a mad rush and the gifts start getting opened and soon the kids are playing with their presents. Vehicles are swirling around. Toy aircraft are flying. It is such a pleasure to watch.

Paul: After a few hours we fuel up with a traditional Christmas brunch.

Sandra: Pizza *fritte*, an old Italian tradition. It's fried dough, covered with sugar. And scrambled eggs, mixed with sausage and cheese. It's my traditional egg dish.

Paul: So [Sandra] had her traditional Christmas breakfast has passed down to our kids and grandchildren, and in recent years [our daughter] Michele has taken charge of the family group of cooks.

Sandra: [Michele's son] Corey usually does the fried dough (pizza fritte). He puts too much sugar on, but it's okay because he's making it and is a darling. When everybody's involved it becomes sweet. They do their own thing, and it's good.

Paul: Then you have [afterward] a continuation of the gift opening festivities, until people get exhausted, then we take a break. After a few hours we have this beautiful Christmas dinner which Sandra always made. And then, the kids help serve and clean-up. The last ceremony is opening Sandra's gifts. Everyone gathers around for this. I have them numbered and ranked by importance— usually 10 or 12 gifts counting down to number 1. The kids hand

them to her in numerical order. The special ones come at the end – 3, 2, and 1. All accompanied by a chorus of oohs and aahs.

Sandra: Our Christmas tradition is my gift to the family.

¹ Paul and Sandra (Gaudenzi) Montrone, interview by Rhonda R. McClure, 12 October 2013, transcript held by Paul Montrone.

² Paul and Sandra (Gaudenzi) Montrone, interviews by Rhonda R. McClure, March 2013 and 12 October 2013, transcripts held by Paul Montrone. The following transcription is a combination of the two interviews and has been rearranged and edited for clarity.

Box 5.4

NEW YEAR'S CELEBRATION IN ROME AND THE VATICAN



*Angelo, Jerome, Sandra and Paul
with Pope John Paul II*

Box 5.4

New Year's Celebration in Rome and the Vatican

Paul and Sandra, with some of their family, travelled to Rome for New Year's and the Epiphany for the four years prior to the year 2000. The purpose was to prepare the family for going to Rome for the Millenium celebration; where to stay, where to eat, the churches to visit, etc. Since the Millenium was really the 2000th anniversary of Jesus' birth, the family believed that the Vatican would be the ideal place to celebrate the occasion.

Being in Rome during New Year's was quite special. Since the Christmas season in Italy extends to the Epiphany (January 6), the city and all the churches are still fully decorated. It is not a big tourist season, so there are no crowds or heavy traffic. And the temperature is typically in the 50s. One can even visit the Sistine Chapel without a line of tourists.

On New Year's Eve, the city explodes. Paul relates, "That night, we stay put in our hotel to avoid the danger and watch the fireworks from the balcony that overlooks the city."

One year, with the assistance of a good friend, Monsignor Hilary Franco, Paul and Sandra had the pleasure of visiting with Pope John Paul II along with other family members including Paul's mother, Beatrice (G2 - M). It started with a Mass in his private chapel very early in the morning, which the Pope celebrated most mornings. This Mass was attended by perhaps 20-30 guests from all over the world. The Pope then greeted all of his guests individually in his large "office", chatting and blessing each and every one. Paul remembered that the Pope was quite easygoing:

My mother was with us and had a rosary to give him as a gift. When he spoke to her, she was so nervous, she forgot to give it to him! But when he was leaving, I caught his eye and he returned. She handed him the rosary --- what would he do with it, I wondered? Well, he blessed it and gave it back to her. And he put his hand on her shoulder.

She later told us that when she died, she wanted to be buried in that dress, with that rosary.

Now what do you think is the difference between the office of the Pope (which was really a large conference room with a desk) and every other executive office I have ever seen. The difference is – no telephone. Why not? I guess he confers with God, who presumably doesn't use a phone. Humans visit or have an “audience” with him – no need for a phone.¹

But the plans for a millennium family trip to Rome changed. During their 1999 visit, Paul heard that for the Millennium New Year celebration, there would be five to ten million visitors expected in Rome. So, notwithstanding four years of annual preparation, the family demurred and celebrated the 2000 New Year's in New Hampshire.

¹ As relayed by Paul Montrone 4 March 2018.

Box 5.5

NONNI T's BIRTHDAY



Box 5.5

Nonni T's Birthday

Memorial Day was an extremely important holiday for the Giancini family. Not only was the holiday a day to remember loved ones who had died while serving in the armed forces, but prior to 1970 it was always observed on May 30th, which also happened to be Settimia (G1 - M) (D'Annibale) Giancini's (known as Nonni T) birthday. Her daughter, Marie (G2 - M) remembered:

So the thing was we had this whole routine. My brother [Dave][David (G2 - M)] would take her up to the cemetery and bring a chair. She would sit at our site, where my father and my sister, I had a baby sister who died, were buried, and then later on my brother Mikey [Mario (G2 - M)] was killed in the war, and it was almost like she would greet everybody...she knew so many people, especially a lot of Italians, and she would stay there until later in the day, when my brother would pick her up and bring her back, and we would have a big to-do. Big dinner, just like a holiday, well it was a holiday,

but we didn't have hot dogs and hamburgs, we had this big dinner. You know. And with a big birthday cake for her. And the whole family would be there. Everyone.

Marie continued:

Now the year she turned 65, which seems to be a milestone, she kept saying to us...my mother spoke broken English or Italian. She would say "65 a' years old, and not even a surprise party!" She kept saying this over and over, well you can't tell her, Mom, if there was going to be a party and if it was a surprise, you wouldn't hear about it! You know?

But they did plan a big surprise party for her on her 65th. It was Memorial Day. I was married and had my own apartment. So instead of having dinner at her house, I invited her and my sister Flo (G2 - M) to dinner at my house and I had my husband, Roger, pick her up at the cemetery. So then after that we took her back to [her] house because we were supposed to have cake, but when she got in there everybody screamed Happy birthday! Surprise! Because it wasn't just family, it was my in-laws,

my sisters in-laws, her friends, and this... It was a houseful. Well she almost had a heart attack. I mean literally.¹

¹ As related by Marie Teot (Paul Montrone's maternal aunt) 14 April 2019

Box 5.6

ST. ANN'S DAY



*St. Ann's Monastery and Shrine Basilica
in Scranton, PA on July 18th*

Box 5.6

St. Ann's Day

St. Ann's Monastery was formed by the Passionist priests in West Scranton in 1904 to honor the mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As the numbers of those seeking weekly devotions increased beyond the capacity of the Monastery, it was decided to build a church which was dedicated on April 2, 1929. In recognition of St. Ann's spiritual importance, in 1997, Pope John Paul II declared St. Ann's Church to be a Basilica¹, one of only 93 (as of this writing) in the United States².

St. Ann was Marie (G2 - M) (Giancini) Teot's patron saint. Marie tells the story:

There was so much wrong with me as a child that I almost died. I remember my brother Dave [David (G2 - M)] saying to me as an adult, that he carried me into the hospital when I was about 5 or 6, more dead than alive. But the Lord's will was that I get better, and the thing is,

a year or two after that, at St. Ann's, my sister Bea [Beatrice (G2 - M)] made me an outfit that was similar to what St. Ann wore, and that's what I wore on St. Ann's day; I had that on all day. This was something that they used to do. At a point in time, I would be blessed, inside St. Ann's church, at the altar and my clothes (more like a robe) were put under the altar there.³

Gene (G3 - M) relates what St. Ann and the monastery meant to the Montrone family over the years:

Each year there is a Novena [nine days of services] at the Monastery leading up to the feast of Saint Ann on July 26th that ... thousands from Scranton and surrounding areas—came to, either all nine days or the triduum, three days, or just the feast day itself. We always went to the triduum and the feast day, and many of the other nine days. The tradition always was the whole family would be there on Saint Ann's day, but we would interact with each other at the services over the nine days one way or another. . .

Because there are so many people there—it's over ten thousand that go there every year, throughout the nine days—there's not enough space inside the church. So the tradition is they have the services either outside, as well as in the church, or over the loudspeaker. People just gather. It's a big campus. There's the monastery, there are hills, there is a grotto where you can light candles, and there are outdoor Stations of the Cross. . . Paul and Sandra have made a lot of donations there. So there are things there, like a station of the cross, which are dedicated to members of our family, because they contributed to its refurbishment.

So if you say this is the tradition, it has been so since we were this high [tiny]. And the memory is my grandmother, who was a heavy weight, sitting on a blanket on the grass. She would need help to get up and down. But, we would always know where she was. She was in the same place. We would run there [and find her] sitting there praying, or whatever, or chewing us out for one thing or another. Telling us to go to the stations, which she originally contributed to because of the death of her son in World War II. So it was that type of thing.

We still do that today. The family members who are here go there.

Because of that tradition, I throw a family party every year for any member of the family who wants to come. It's always the weekend closest to Saint Ann's day. My aunts will come up from Philadelphia, or Tony (G3 - M) will come in from Jersey, or whatever. That's the family party [that] is that weekend [with] all the cousins and everybody in the area who is coming up to visit the Novena at Saint Ann's. That's the tradition that's lived on since I was a child, that's external to the holidays.⁴

To Paul, St. Ann's Monastery has a larger personal impact. It is a Passionate Priest Monastery, and the founder of the Passionists was St. Paul of the Cross. Paul's parents were so devoted to this holy place, that he was named "Paul" after its founder.

¹ St. Ann's Monastery and Shrine Basilica; <https://www.stannsmonasterybasilica.org/st-anns-history.html>, accessed on 28 June 2021 by Karen Keyes