

## *Reflection on a Life Well-Lived*

John's life began in a small village in the southern region of Italy, known as Calabria. He was a first-born child in a family of five children, one of whom died in infancy. His father Vincenzo was a World War I veteran who served time in a German Prisoner of War camp, where he suffered but survived. After the war ended, he sought a better and more prosperous life for his family, and decided to seek his fortune in the United States. When John was a child of 6 or 7, his father left for the U.S., where he worked for five years to save money to bring his family across the ocean.

As the oldest child, John took on responsibility for his mother and younger brother Ernest while his father was away. He took the responsibility seriously, and throughout his life he was a mentor to his siblings, especially his sister Theresa and brother Orlando who were born in the U.S.

John talked many times about the family coming to America to start a new life. They prepared for a year, acquiring the necessary paperwork and medical examinations. Finally, with a mixture of excitement and sadness, they took the voyage over rough seas to Ellis Island, where they met up with his father and settled in Niagara Falls, NY.

John's first experiences in America were difficult. He spoke no English, and although he was 12 years old and an excellent student in Italy, he was placed in a lower grade and often suffered humiliating taunts from his peers. He

was quite athletic as a teenager and young adult, played tennis well and took up boxing too. He used to talk humorously about one particular advantage he had in boxing: His nose was somewhat flexible and could be struck in numerous ways without breaking it. He said he liked the challenge of taking on an opponent in an equal and fair fight, and I heard that he put a few fellows in their places. He always kept his boxing gloves as a reminder of his school years, and they remain in his belongings even now.

John's love for music began in his earliest of memories. In Italy at the age of 8 he was given a small trumpet to play in a neighborhood band. He had been told he would have a clarinet, but when the instruments arrived, he was one of the smallest and youngest members of the band, and took one of the last instruments to be given out. He made the best of it, and soon developed a passion for playing. His mother believed he had talent, and lined up a teacher for him in the city.

In Niagara Falls, John's skill with the trumpet opened many doors. While he struggled to learn English, he needed no translator for playing in the band. "Music is the universal language", and it brought many good things into his life, including a scholarship to Michigan State University.

It was in East Lansing that John met Alice Amsden, and their lives became intertwined. Alice was also a music student and was blessed with a beautiful singing voice. The story goes that she far outshined John in playing the violin, one of the required courses in the music curriculum. Their romance blossomed

I can remember my father searching for particular instrumentalists such as a French horn player all over the state in order to perform pieces on the program. They would often audition at the house, and receive special tutoring from him in order to prepare for the performance.

My friends and I loved it when the Winston Salem Journal would show up at the house to get a photo to promote an upcoming concert. If we knew it ahead of time, we would casually show up in hopes of getting our picture in the paper. Sometimes, to our delight, the ploy worked!

We children always attended the concerts. My favorite was Carnation Night in May, when we dressed formally and everyone renewing their symphony season membership was given a red carnation to wear. I always got a red carnation and wore it with pride! It was a very special evening I looked forward to every year.

Usually, we kids and our friends who came with us to concerts were very quiet and well behaved. On one occasion, I recall being a little silly and noisy throughout the performance. Afterward I dreaded going home because I was afraid my mother would be mad at me. When she finally got the chance to speak to me in private, my mother simply reminded me of my obligation as a family member, to maintain a proper image by behaving appropriately at all times, because others were always watching and judging the entire family based on what they saw me and my brother do. I never misbehaved at a concert ever again.

John accepted people as they are. He appreciated the diversity of humankind and found joy in nature and in life in general. He loved warm weather, fishing, good Italian food, and a good laugh. He found humor in nearly everything, and used it in a positive way. He had a huge capacity for love and for making others feel appreciated and special.

Music was the magic in his life, and he was the magic in our lives. He was "one in a million."