

Grandpa

written by: His favorite granddaughter

**Glen Beck was right when he said
parents and grandparents must
teach their children about
American History. My political
leanings are the ones I got
on my grandpa's lap.**

**Every Sunday was "visit grandma
and grandpa day." On those days
my mom, dad, grandmother and
little brother would be off doing some
other stuff.....My grandpa and I
would sit on the sofa while he went
through: The New York Post, The
Daily News, The New York Times plus;
a newspaper written in Italian,
and newspapers in Spanish,
Greek, German and the Home
News.....a famous Bronx newspaper.**

I couldn't have been older than 6 or 7. He was unquestionably opinionated. Those were my first history lessons.....also, to my mom's chagrin, my first swear words.....said in Italian.

My grandparents left Sicily as a young couple with 2 small children who didn't survive the trip. Like many other Europeans, they left their homeland in search of the "American Dream." They landed somewhere in Canada..... moving down through the state finally making their home in the South Bronx. This was probably about 1889. He lived to be 94 years old, still reading every newspaper he could get his hands on.....still swearing when he disagreed with a politician or news reporter.

Grandpa would give me my Sunday history lesson without fail. His English wasn't perfect, but I got the jest of what he was telling me. When he thought something was not "kosher" boy, would he let me know! That's when he caught my attention. Like the Big Bad Wolf knocking on the door. He would point out what he thought was wrong, what he thought was right and why. It was obvious he loved his new country. It was also obvious he wasn't a liberal.

I also learned to love animals from him. He had a German Shepherd named Florae and 2 white Persian cats also name Florae. After our history lesson it was pony riding time.....the best of the best. My grandparents had given me a pony which I named Flower..... not to be confused with the other Floraes.

Flower was the perfect pony, quiet, gentle and would let anyone ride her. Her coat had the tint of fresh honey, with a mane and tail of flaxen. Her dark chocolate colored eyes were laced with flaxen lashes.

She was stabled in the backyard in a nice clean shed; curried and cared for by my nanny, Peter.

Peter must have been 13 or 14 years old.....blond and blue eyed.....not Sicilian.....for sure. Probably an orphan my grandparents found.

They were like that.

In the summer, out doors in that wonderful garden they had, Grandma and Grandpa would do the homemade spaghetti thing. Big ceramic bowls would be filled with white Italian flour, eggs and salt. Grandpa had this large heavy piece of marble placed on a stout table that Grandma used for kneading. She kneaded that dough for 15 minutes!

Grandma was a tiny woman, but her arms were like steel! Every once in a while grandpa would drop in a bit of water.

Then came the rolling, flipping, adding extra flour to prevent sticking; rolling and stretching even more until the dough looked transparent.

Finally rolled out into wide strands that would be cut and hung on old broom sticks suspended between a dozen odd, long forgotten chairs to dry in the sun. The raw dough was then covered with netting to keep the flies and other insects off the dough.

Peter, mom and I would pick fresh tomatoes, basil, garlic from the garden.....all this in the Bronx? You betcha. Grandpa would make enough sauce to supply the US Army.

As I said, my grandmother was a tiny woman; but she had a braid down her back that reached to her hips. The most beautiful hair I've ever seen.....black and gray. I remember that she always wore what was called a "house dress". It was always a different one each time I saw her. Her shoes always had a fine heel to them, which as a kid I envied and would sneak into her closet to try them on and play dress-up.

In my eyes, as a child, my grandpa was a giant of a man. He, too, had this thick, wavy black and gray head of hair.....followed below with black eyes that could see right through you and of course, a big black and gray mustache. Looking through old photos I see that he wasn't a "giant", maybe, at the most 5 ft. 7in. ...maybe.....

His arms always folded across his chest as if commanding respect. My grandparents' American Dream came true. Grandpa owned and operated a bar, billiard parlor, which also turned out to be a dance hall on holidays and weekends. My mom and her brothers, Larry and Mike won many dance trophies. As a teenager I loved to watch my mom dance with my Uncle Mike. They could really swing. I would watch and think: my mom could do that? It was awesome. My grandma, too was a dancer: the Charleston, Quick Step, Tango. It was like watching "Dancing with the Stars", only they were the stars. I guess kids were allowed in bars then. There was so many people watching out for us kids, plus we got to dance, too.....in a corner!

**Grandpa was also known as the
Sicilian medicine man. Peter
and I would accompany him on
Grandpa's Saturday rounds.**

**Peter was supposed to keep an eye on
me and mix, blend, concoct a mixture
of herbs, liquids, almond nut seeds
ground into a paste.....**

as prescribed by Grandpa.

**Our family still uses some of his
remedies and I find more and more
of what he did then in health
articles today. Was he ahead of his
time?**

Maybe.

**Peter would have me mounted on top
of Flower as we followed Grandpa
on his medical rounds from house to
house. Today, all of us probably
would be in jail.....Grandpa for
practicing medicine without a license,
Peter and me for juvenile
delinquency, and Flower impounded.**

My mom told me when I was in high school that Peter did become a doctor.

And I have to tell you: I loved all my history classes from 1st grade up through high school. It was one of my favorite subjects. I still use some of the health techniques and therapies I learned from my travels with Grandpa and Peter. What went around comes again. A lot of his techniques and cures are now practiced by Drs. who get paid for what my Grandpa did for no fee.....maybe for a cup of espresso with a shot of anisette.

When I moved to New Mexico my grandpa gave me a young maple tree to plant in the desert. Of course the tree didn't make it.....a lesson learned. Desert is desert, not for

maple trees .

I flew back to New York for my Grandpa's 100th birthday. He was much the same: always swearing at the newspapers, etc. He did tell me that his life was the most interesting: in his time he told me he saw the first autos, the first planes, the first flight into space. He said there was nothing left for him to see.

Grandpa was living with his daughter at the time. Aunt Margret told me that she had to take Grandpa to the dentist. He still had all his teeth, but was complaining about a tooth ache. The dentist cleaned his teeth, gave him a good check up, (no x-rays for grandpa). The dentist told my Aunt that Grandpa was cutting his 3rd set of molars!

That in itself was strange. The dentist said it did happen, but he had never seen it. He said it was very rare.

I frequently watched my Grandpa eat.....

all fresh, organic stuff (I never saw him put yogurt in his mouth), but he did like his big cigars, black coffee with a shot of whiskey.

His usual breakfast was: 1 pork chop covered with fresh steamed spinach, olive oil poured over it, thick slices of crusty Italian bread which he dipped in the left over olive oil. For dessert: the big cigar, black coffee with the shot of whiskey. The whiskey was probably home made as well as all the wine he drank. That came in his later years.....after 85 or so.

Grandpa began to fail in his 90's. His circulation slowed down and caused some numbness in his leg. He became very annoyed by this inconvenience.

When he was finally hospitalized and was told that the Drs. would have to amputate his leg, he became furious. He told them "leave my leg alone. I am going to leave this Earth the way I arrived. Every part of me in place." He said goodbye to his family that night, fell asleep, in peace and left this Earth.....hopefully

for a place that had lots of newspapers that he could make explosive remarks about, but not that bad that he would be casted down to where there wouldn't be newspapers for him to swear it. That surely would he hell for him.

The other night I dreamed of him,
something that had never happened
before. I had made some coconut
muffins and offered him one.

He said, "Oh, no, I can't eat
them. I'm allergic." My response
was: "Grandpa, you're dead,
you can eat anything."

He smiled back at me and said
"OH, yeah, right. I'll take
two with a little olive oil. You got
some espresso with anisette to go with
that?"