**What were your maternal grandparents like?**

My mother’s parents both were born in Catania, Sicily. They were brought to America as children and met here as young adults. I only knew them at the end of their lives, but they must have had interesting lives as first-generation Americans.

My grandfather’s family emigrated from Sicily to Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn. His father, Vincenzo D’Arrigo was a fisherman. But my grandfather was never destined to go into his father’s profession. He never liked being on the water, and actually never learned to swim. His father died when he was seventeen, and as the oldest child he became the principal breadwinner of the family. (Interestingly, one of his first jobs was to deliver bread in Brooklyn.)

My grandfather had a brilliant intellect, and if given half a chance he would have been a brilliant lawyer. But like many immigrant children, from an early age he had to go out and find any work he could to support the family. There was no time or money for college. In fact, there was no time for even high school. But between making money to support his family, he studied for and earned his high school equivalency diploma. That must have been an incredible feat for a youngster working full time, especially one for whom English was not his native language. He went on to study accounting and became an accountant.

When my grandfather was born in June 1893, his birth name was Mario D’Arrigo. But by the time he earned his high school equivalency diploma, he had Americanized it to Morris D’Arrigo. And that was the only name his wife, Angela Raineri, ever knew him by.

My grandmother was born in Catania in September 1902, and her family emigrated to Passaic, New Jersey when she was just a toddler. As a woman of her times, she had very little formal education. She was raised to be a wife and mother. I don’t know the specifics of how my grandparents met, but my best guess is that it was at a church dance at Mount Carmel Church in Passaic.

Their romance was not looked upon kindly by my grandfather’s mother, Vincenza. She saw my grandmother as possibly taking away her sole support. And so in April of 1923 my grandparents eloped to Atlantic City and got married with no family present. My grandfather bought a two-family house in Passaic and moved his mother into the first floor. He and my grandmother lived on the top floor. This would be the arrangement for the rest of my great grandmother’s life. She died in 1948, just five years before I was born.

My maternal grandparents had four daughters followed by a son in 1934. Following Italian custom, the son was named Vincent after his grandfather. My mother Margaret was the third girl, born in 1928.

After his mother died, my grandfather built his retirement house in Clifton. It was built as a two-family house so that my grandmother would have income from a tenant after he died.

My earliest memories of my grandfather are in his basement office in the Clifton house where he had his accountancy business. He would be working on his big ledger books and he would give me a piece of paper and let me play with his check-writing machine. This was a gadget with buttons for the amount of the check. I remember it printed in black, blue and red. He also let us play with his adding machine. We wasted yards of tape on him.

My grandfather was a voracious reader. Whenever he wasn’t working, he would be curled up in a chair with a book, usually mysteries or westerns. He also loved short stories and introduced me to O. Henry. Growing up, my grandparents would visit their children all week long and then on Sunday everyone would come to their house. We were the Monday night visit. My grandparents came to visit us every Monday night. The rest of the week they visited each of their other children. This went on every week as long as my grandfather was still able to drive. My grandmother never learned to drive.

My grandmother was the best cook and the best baker I have ever known. As a young mother she made separate meals for each of her very-picky-eater children. So she had the skills of a short-order cook. My grandfather, despite being Italian, was a meat-and-potatoes man. He didn’t particularly like pasta. So my grandmother would often make him a separate meal when the whole family was over on Sunday.

I think my favorite thing that my grandmother would make was her pizza. When she did that (often as the Sunday evening meal) she would fry the leftover dough for us kids and sprinkle sugar over it as our dessert. She also made a fabulous applesauce cake.

It’s not surprising that most of my memories of my grandmother are in her kitchen. That was her domain, as the basement office was my grandfather’s. My grandmother had three grandsons between December 29, 1952 and April 9, 1953. She played an important role in helping her daughters during that period. She was always around when my mother needed her.

I especially remember her being around after my father died. She even slept over at our house in the days immediately after. I overheard her tell my grandfather that she felt my mother needed the company, just to reassure that she would never be alone and the family would help her get by. And she decided to sleep next to my mother despite her knowledge that my father had just died in that spot. It was a selfless act that epitomized my grandmother’s devotion to her family.

My grandfather had a heart condition and diabetes in later life, but these did not slow him down much in the 1960s. He threw a big party at a fancy restaurant in 1973 to celebrate my grandparents’ 50th wedding anniversary. But by 1978 his health was deteriorating quickly. He attended my cousin Robert’s wedding in Connecticut in June, but by the time my wedding came around in November he was no longer up to it. He apologized to me in advance and handed me an envelope with a generous wedding check inside. I smiled when I saw it had been written with the same checkwriter that I had played with as a child.

My grandfather was hospitalized in 1980 and died soon afterwards. My grandmother lived until 1991, but after her husband died, she was prone to depression. She was no longer up to having everyone over every week. My mother would come on Sunday afternoon and pick her up and take her to visit her other children. It also gave my mother the opportunity to visit her beloved Rutt’s Hut beforehand.

My mother’s parents were hard-working people who did everything for their family. They were the embodiment of showing love by action. My grandfather raised his family from poverty to a comfortable life through hard work and ability. In retirement, he and my grandmother took annual cruises to Italy and other places. They lived to see all of their children have good lives and their oldest grandchildren marry. And I think my grandfather was especially pleased when I started law school just a few months before he died. I think he was proud I was going to fulfill his dream.