

Friends of the Gloucester Council on Aging

Present:

“The Past is A Present” Series

Senior Profile:

Ida Spinola

Ida celebrated her 80th birthday this past March 21st. She did it up right by celebrating with her family and close friends. For Ida, her family has been her life’s passion. When we first met, she immediately told me the story of her father, Cosimo Parco. He was born in a small town in Sicily, Sperdo Cavato, which Ida says she has never been able to find on a map of Sicily. (If anyone knows where it is in Sicily, please contact Ida at the Senior Center!) When Cosimo emigrated to the United States as a young man in his teens, he went through Ellis Island, as did so many of Gloucester’s Sicilian forefathers, or so Ida thought. Many years after Cosimo’s death, Ida went to New York City to review the family history at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. She was confused as to why she couldn’t find any of her father’s immigration records. When she mentioned this to her older cousin, it was only then that she found out that Cosimo had “jumped ship” from the vessel he was on right before it landed on Ellis Island so he never had official documented papers as a US citizen coming off the boat from Italy. He remained with family in Brooklyn for a while, but when he moved north to start a career as a fisherman, he was told he needed to be a US citizen if he wanted to become a licensed commercial fisherman in Gloucester. One of his proudest days was his swearing-in ceremony in Boston to become a US citizen along with a number of his buddies who “jumped ship” with him outside of Ellis Island. Cosimo was the intrepid Captain and owner of the fishing vessel the *Marianna* which sailed out of Gloucester for many years.

Ida’s mother, Catherine (Orlando) Parco, was born in Boston, and both of her parents were born in Sicily, as well. Catherine was only 16 when she married Cosimo. Dedicated to raising nine children (seven survived), Ida fondly remembers the loving home her mother created and, in particular, the amazing cook she was, particularly citing her

Sicilian-style baked stuffed haddock with lobster. Ida's only remaining sibling is her youngest brother, 67-year-old Chris Parco of North Andover, MA. She notes with amazement still that her mother Catherine gave birth to Chris when she was 43 years old. In particular, Ida wanted to mention her deceased sister Josephine with whom she enjoyed so many pleasurable years doing arts and crafts together at her home in Danvers.

Ida and her husband Capt. Emilio (also from Gloucester) met at a wedding in Gloucester and have been happily married for almost 61 years. Emilio was a fisherman for 45 years and the proud Captain of the *St. Mary* out of Gloucester. (Ida made a beautiful painting of the *St. Mary* at the Senior Center.) The couple have 4 children: Stephanie Jackson of Gloucester, Catherine Aiello of California, Dominic Spinola of Gloucester and Natalie Hazbenstab who lives in Metheun. Ida is blessed with 10 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren. Over the last 30 years, Ida has been actively engaged with helping her children and grandchildren raise their families, babysitting for all 20 children as far away as California.

With her great grandchildren growing older, Ida's time was freed up a bit more, so she joined the Senior Center about 15 years ago. Her first words were "How can I help?" to Lucy Sheehan, the Executive Director, and Juni Van Dyke, the Art Coordinator.

Her first activity at the Senior Center was the majestic "From Sea to Shining Sea" quilt project which pays tribute to the glory of the 50 United States in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Taking over four years to make, Ida was one of the original workers on the quilt and was invited to participate in its public unveiling and an elegant lunch at the State House in Boston along with State Senator Bruce Tarr and State Representative Tony Verga.

Ida was inspired by Juni Van Dyke to join the Have-a-Heart Doll Project. Under the supervision of Lois Stillman, Ida learned how to hand make the one-of-a-kind dolls that have brought so many smiles to the

faces of hundreds of children in hospitals and the elderly in nursing homes.

About three years ago, one of Ida's great grandchildren was born with a severe liver problem and required a liver transplant. The child had a successful operation at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Ida made the trip to Philadelphia to be with her great grandson and family. She was so impressed by the kindness and generosity the hospital provided to the children and their families that she personally delivered 15 dolls from the Senior Center Have-a Heart Project to all of the appreciative children at the facility. With unusual irony, her great granddaughter was born with the exact same liver disease two years later, and she too underwent a successful liver transplant at the same Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Our final conversation for the interview was held the Monday after the final weekend in June, and Ida and Capt. Emilio's weekend plans consisted of the same ritual they have celebrated for the last 60 years of their marriage: Viva San Pietro!

Written by Carla Grillo