

## Umberto & Raffaele Zeppieri Family



Umberto Zeppieri & Amedea Sonni



Raffaele Zeppieri and Vera Stagnetti

In 1912, my grandfather Umberto Zeppieri (age 25) married my grandmother Amedea Sonni (age 21) in Ferentino, Italy. Shortly after their marriage they made the decision to come to America and join the many other Ferentino families that were making Rockford their new American destination. During their early years here they had three children, Enrica (July 4, 1913), Bruno (March 4, 1915) and my father Raffaele (October 1, 1916).

Unfortunately, due to health concerns, the duration of their stay in America was shortlived. My grandmother Amedea suffered with rheumatic health and back problems and was advised by doctors to move to areas of the country with warmer dryer climates, away from the harsh snowy Midwestern winters. So, after approximately 4 years in Rockford they made the decision to take the three children and move back to Ferentino where the Mediterranean climate was more to her benefit. In Ferentino they had two more children, Rosa and Marcello. Sixteen years after returning to Ferentino, they moved to Rome where Umberto began a taxi service. In Rome they had their 6<sup>th</sup> child, Franco. As they grew to young men, Raffaele, Bruno and Marcello assisted with the family taxi business. My Nonno Umberto's knowledge of the American English language made him a favorite for American tourists who could easily communicate with him. One of his most memorable memories was taking the Macy family, from New York's Macy's department store, through the historical Italian sites and countryside, as their private tour guide. My father Raffaele, and his brothers Bruno and Marcello, eventually joined him in the taxi business career and loved working on their motor vehicles.

On June 11, 1949 my father Raffaele married his neighbor sweetheart, Vera Stagnetti, in Rome, Italy. I (Massimo) was born one year later on June 12, 1950 in Rome, and my brother Roberto was born on December 29, 1952, also in Rome. During this time my father was employed as the chauffeur to the Ambassador of Thailand stationed in Rome, and my mother was an administrative secretary for a business firm. In 1958 both my parents made the decision to come to America and seek a new and better life. First, my

father came alone to America in 1958 on the ship Christopher Columbus from the Port of Naples. He was sponsored by Rockford family members, Chester and Mary Zeppieri. We always revered them as “Uncle Chester” and “Aunt Mary”. They were wonderful people who hosted many beautiful Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter holidays through our early years in America.

After living and working in Rockford through his first year, my father Raffaele contacted my mother to pack up the family and make the trip to America during the month of August, 1959....I was 9 years old and my brother was 6. I can still remember how strange we felt of leaving our families and home country of Italy, with neither of us knowing a stich of the English language.

After nine days’ departure from Naples, we arrived in the port of New York on the Italian Liner the Augustus. From there we took an overnite train to Chicago. Once in Chicago we were met at the Union Train Station by Dr. Michael Monteleone, who drove to meet us at the station, and bring us back to Rockford. We settled in an upper apartment my father had rented in South Rockford on Corbin and 825 Montague St. where many Italian families lived. My brother and I were quickly introduced to our new school at St. Anthony of Padua. As an incoming third grader I spent my early months with first graders trying to learn the English language. I remember, with great gratitude, my third grade teacher Mrs. Celletti, who was luckily bilingual, assisting me in navigating through a variety of English lessons.

Although, different and strange at first, these were such very good times for my brother and I. We met so many other kids from Italian families and quickly became daily friends with most of them at St. Anthony’s. Even today, most of us from those St. Anthony days still try to meet once a year, and every year, to rekindle our friendships and Italian comradery on the Thursday before the opening of Festa Italiana.

In 1962 we moved to the Northwest side of Rockford in a brand new home. My brother Roberto and I attended Roosevelt Junior High and later West High School. After high school, my brother enrolled and graduated from Southern Illinois University as an Electrical Engineer and I enrolled and graduated from Western Illinois University with a degree in Industrial Education and Technology.

After college Roberto moved to Chicago with a new job in the medical equipment field and now works and resides near Delevan WI. He has three children Mandy Zeppieri, Cory Zeppieri and Troy Zeppieri, including a multitude of grandchildren. I came back to Rockford and never left. I worked for Sundstrand Aviation for 10 years and married my wife Bonnie (Bolinger) Ogden in 1989. We have two sons, Richard Ogden and Alex Zeppieri. Richard is in the landscaping business and Alex is presently a Senior at the University of Iowa pursuing a degree in Civil Engineering. In 1991 I started my own business where both my wife and I still work, to this day.

Submitted on 2014 by Massimo Zeppieri for the Geneology Project for Culture and Education Committee of GRIAA “Immigration Histories of Rockford Italian Families”.