



Italian Historical Society of America

Newsletter

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Tutto Italiano **Benvenuto a *Tutto Italiano***

Perched on a basalt cliff overlooking the village of Roccascalegna (region of Abruzzo), a castle appears to have been carved from the rock it sits on. Accessible only by foot, the [Castle of Roccascalegna](#) was built – according to numerous sources – sometime in the eleventh or twelfth century during the end of the Lombard regime and before the [Norman rule of southern Italy](#).

Aptly described as resembling “a giant witch’s cloak rising up from the lush surrounding floor trying to break free,” the castle presents an imposing vision of a dark and mysterious past; and rightly so. According to legend, in the mid-1600s, the heartless and mercenary owner, Baron Corvo de Corvis, enforced an ancient rule on the village – *jus primae noctis*, the Latin term for “right of the first night” – requiring all newly married females to spend the first night of their marriage with him.

So far, no records of how long this arrangement was in practice are available, but the legend continues with the Baron being stabbed during an escapade – either by the bride or her husband disguised as the bride. As the perpetrator fled, the Baron placed his bloody hand against the wall, leaving a mark that could not be removed. That part of the castle collapsed in the 1940s, but tales still circulate about the bloody handprint that is still visible, along with appearances of the Baron’s ghost on cold stormy nights.

The castle was renovated, with work completed in the late 1990s. It is open for tours, and late last year, the mayor of Roccascalegna announced the [entire castle is available to rent for just 100 Euro a day](#).

[Roccascalegna – Abruzzo’s Castle in the Sky](#)

[Roccascalegna and its Medieval Castle](#) (Scroll down for aerial video of castle)

[Roccascalegna, From Legend to Cinema](#)

[Roccascalegna Castle Quick Tour](#) (YouTube Video)

[Castello Medievale di Roccascalegna](#) (Official website in Italian)

From the Italian American Press

The Italian American Press offers a great selection of books – children’s, memoirs, art, history, food, the supernatural, the natural beauty of Italy, and more – for every interest. Help preserve Italian American heritage and history. Support authors of Italian heritage who write about Italian American and Italian culture and let them know you found their books on the Italian American Press.

New Books

[First Spritz is Free: Confessions of Venice Addicts](#) Edited by Kathleen Ann González

Kathleen Ann González, who wrote several books about Venice, wondered if others felt the same about the city. She found many who did and edited this collection of stories written by Venetophiles – those in love with Venice – who describe their love for the city through their “memories, adventures, and dreams.”

[Memories of Ciro's](#) by Lauren Scibelli Mullin

Combining recipes with memories of growing up in a family that owned a popular Italian restaurant in Springfield, Massachusetts, Lauren Scibelli Murrin offers a nostalgic look back in time. Behind-the-scenes accounts of restaurant life pay tribute to the Italian work ethic and the importance of a loving family. Over 45 restaurant and family recipes are included

Featured Books

A [special collection of books](#) that emphasize the history of Italy and the tragedy of war.

***The Italian Achievement: An A to Z of Over 1000 Firsts Achieved by Italians* by Arturo Barone**

The fourth edition – originally published as *Italians First* – provides a list of Italian accomplishments affecting every aspect of life and several chapters on the history of Italy and its people.

***Famous Italians You Probably Never Heard Of* by Peter V. Tafuri**

Written in chronological order, starting with the ancient Greek colonies in Italy and ending in the twentieth century, the author provides accounts of various “superstars in the Italian galaxy” – its people, places, and culture.

***The Winds of Time: An Analytical Study of the Titans Who Shaped Western Civilization* by Rich DiSilvio**

A modern perspective of the political, religious, and influential people that shaped the course of history for Western civilization.

***A Camp Without Walls* by Maria Lombardio**

The true story of Salvatore Lombardo, who joined the Italian army during World War II, was captured by the Nazis, and imprisoned in a labor camp. Maria Lombardo writes about her father’s survival after his release and the affect his imprisonment had on his life and the lives of subsequent generations of his family. (Book review and author interview available soon.)

***The Cielo: A Novel of Wartime Tuscany* by Paul Salsini**

As World War II rages around them, the villagers in a farmhouse overcome petty differences, face betrayal by one of them, fearlessly take in an escaped POW, and survive a raid by the SS

***Sparrow's Revenge: A Novel of Postwar Tuscany* by Paul Salsini**

A riveting story of the relentless search by a member of the Italian Resistance for the collaborator of the massacre at Sant'Anna di Stazzema.

**Featured Author Joseph C. Polacco: *Vina, A Brooklyn Memoir*
Book Overview**

Joe writes from his heart in this tribute to his mother, Vina, and to his old neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. In reaching out to the many whose lives intertwined with Vina’s, he found a rich collection of stories in their memories of his mother’s character, strength, and love. Compiling those stories offered him a look back to childhood memories and a reconnection to his Italian heritage. (Book review available soon.)

Author Interview (Excerpt)

What inspired you to write your book?

Two factors: The first was a connection to the Italian-American culture of 1950s Brooklyn. The second and most important factor was learning of Vina’s dealing with a recurrent cancer, [and] in increasingly frank discussions, I realized how loved and how unselfish she was.

What is the most important attribute of your book?

It is a valentine to my Mom, mother of many in the 'hood. She was a beacon to many, and through this book I try to reflect some of her light back on her.

Why should someone read it?

Virtually all of us are immigrants. We are stronger Americans by recognizing and embracing our immigrant backgrounds. So, the book is not only a journey of rediscovery of my Italian roots, but speaks to all immigrants, and how we interacted.

In writing about your mother, what were some of the emotions you experienced?

Obviously, I felt a void, if that can be called an emotion; but the writing and fact checking with Mom's network helped populate that void. It was as if Mom was with me ...

In the book, is there a more compelling story about your mother – one that has a more personal or special meaning to you?

When I was with Mom at Manhattan's South Seaport, circa 2007. We had arrived very early to meet and spend the day with family members. Having time to spare we had a nice long visit, just we two.

[Read the rest of Joe's reply and the entire interview on the Italian American Press.](#)

Special Offer

Interested in the history of Italy and Italian food? Looking for a contemporary romance novel with a little suspense? Need some delicious new recipes to add to your collection? Like a good sale? The ebook version of my book *Con Amore* is available at 50 percent off (just \$2.00) until January 21, 2019. Grab a glass of wine or a cappuccino and access here: <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/88866>

Caution: Eat before reading; or better yet, make one of the recipes in the book and eat while reading!

Italian American Heritage Project

The Italian American Heritage Project (IAHP) provides educational resources about Italian American history, heritage, and culture with a straightforward view on the roles of Italians in American history and culture.

Italians and Italian Americans have contributed much to American culture, but have also endured much mistreatment starting with discrimination toward Italian immigrants during the late 1800s and early 1900s, the internment of Italians during World War II, stereotypes associated with gangsters and Italian traditions, the lack of Italian American history taught in schools, and the defamation of Christopher Columbus.

The problem with Columbus stems from two incidents spanning about 30 years – the teaching in schools that he was responsible for genocide and slave trade in America and the lack of a collective approach from the Italian American community to dispel these claims.

In the past five years, the list of states and cities that have dismissed recognizing Columbus Day or have replaced Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day has grown larger each year. This may correlate to the growth of social media and the ease in dispensing any type of information. Combined with misguided teachings and no coordinated rebuttal, Columbus Day has become the unfortunate target of ignorance and indifference.

Reversing the damage requires a lot of work – educational programs are needed, media cooperation is required, and the Italian American community has to stand together with a united message. Last November, the National Italian American Foundation issued its [Statement on Christopher Columbus Holiday](#). A few passages:

“The National Italian American Foundation (NIAF) supports Christopher Columbus Day and opposes public campaigns that advocate for its elimination as a federal holiday. ... When Columbus Day was founded in 1937, the federal holiday provided a sense of dignity and self worth in light of the hostility and discrimination many Italian immigrants, Italians Americans, and Catholics (more broadly) faced. ... NIAF feels strongly that as citizens, we should not attempt to deny America’s history, nor should we try to erase it. This nation provides ample opportunity to have a reasonable debate in the public square over various aspects of a historic figure’s legacy. ... In our view, it is unfair to apply today’s political norms on a historical figure from 500 years ago. ... We believe Christopher Columbus properly represents the values of discovery and risk that are at the heart of the American dream. ... We believe that to repeal Columbus Day as a federal holiday, which is celebrated by over 20 million Italian Americans, only to replace it by another holiday celebrated by another ethnic group, would be culturally insensitive.”

Next – a nationwide major media campaign should be created.

As for educational programs, I recently developed four grade level/age appropriate lesson plans based on the three letters Columbus wrote – to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand; Luis De Sant Angel (Santangel), who helped finance the voyage; and Gabriel Sanchez, treasurer of the Monarchs.

Copies of his letters were made – by hand – sent to printers throughout Europe, translated into different languages, copied, printed, and distributed in other countries. At least 17 editions of the printed and translated letters have been documented. Each version of the letter is worded differently, and the misinformation taught in schools and found online is based on phrases of just a few words taken out of context from the letters. (I have seen several lesson plans that demean Columbus and propose to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day.)

The lesson plans I created include Word documents with teachers’ instructions and class assignments, PowerPoint Presentations, and links to websites that provide correlating information. All include activities to keep student’s interest, and topics for class discussions.

All are available at sharemylesson.com; here are the direct links:

What Did Columbus Say?

Grades 1-2: <https://sharemylesson.com/teaching-resource/what-did-columbus-say-306521>

Grades 3-4: <https://sharemylesson.com/teaching-resource/what-did-columbus-say-306951>

Grades 5-8: <https://sharemylesson.com/teaching-resource/what-did-columbus-say-307148>

Decoding the Columbus Letter (Grades 9-12):

<https://sharemylesson.com/teaching-resource/decoding-columbus-letter-307149>

Registration is required, but – unlike other websites with lesson plans – there is no fee to access or download the resources.

If you are a teacher, home school, in an Italian American organization, or would like to learn more about what Columbus said, the lesson plans are a good resource for providing an objective learning experience and a counterbalance to what is being taught about Columbus. More on the IAHP website here: [Lesson Plans](#).

Also available on the website, [a list of Italian American museums, several historical and cultural centers \(more to be added\), and the national Italian American organizations](#).

On the Radio

West Coast Italian Radio (WCIR), based near Seattle, is hosted by Tony La Stella and Marzia Clyons and every Monday broadcasts an hour of “everything Italian”

Notice About Links: On the date of publication, the links in this newsletter were current. In older newsletters, some links may be inactive if the URL has changed or is no longer available.

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