

How I found the Italian in me.

Crystal May Ainardi (July 04, 2008)



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I've never read the book, "Were You Always an Italian?" by Maria Laurino, so I won't pretend I have, but the reviews are a very mixed bag. (<http://www.sicilianculture.com/news/alwaysitalian.htm> [2]) My own story could be similar in finding my Italia. I'm not a full blooded Italian. I've got a mix of other Northern European and Native American from my mother. Do I embrace these cultures too? You bet. In fact as a kid, it was what I knew best. Being an Irish and Native American meant more to



me then Italian, even if my surname ended in a vowel.

I grew up in a home that had concealed its identity almost 80 years before. I knew I was Italian, but we really didn't talk about it or embrace it like one should. Grandpa didn't want to talk about his parents the "immigrants". He only shared a few words of Italian with me, and he really had no idea where his family came from when I showed him a map. "Oh, it's somewhere up north by France." We joked about being Italian, if we even bothered talking about being Italian. We watched mob movies and compared ourselves to them. If gathered in groups "we all smelled like Garlic". We called each other "Wop's" and "Dego's". I didn't know there were problems with any of this until I grew up.

I call this the identity crisis. Last summer I knew my last name as Anarde. My grandfather had nine siblings. Half of them spelt our surname Anardi but when I asked why, no one seemed to have the answer. I knew growing up telling people I was part Italian I was given strange looks. I wasn't the "typical Italian" look. I was blond, blue eyed and the name wasn't right. The only thing that linked me to a Roman past was the nose. I grew up watching these mob movies with these women like in "GoodFellas" thinking I needed to have the big hair, smacking gum, hide stuff for my men, and getting beat on. I couldn't identify. I started to think maybe I'm not so much Italian. I had the wrong skin, hair, eyes, personality (according to the media) and even name.

So last summer my brother had gone to Rome with his college class and when he came back he got me really interested in looking into our grandfather's "hidden" past. I had already started to research my mother's side of the family with the Native American family, but with no success.

At almost 30 I did finally find the answer to our name. I can only imagine what it's like for one who has found out that he or she was adopted. This damage though, was almost 80 years old. For my name was not Anarde nor was my other family members' name Anardi. It was not pronounced the way I had recited it for all my years. I had found the key to the past; my great grandparent's hidden names. Ainardi was our surname and no one knew. All those who knew the secret were dead. My great grandfather's name was not Louis as it said on his death certificate, it was Luigi. My great grandmothers name was not Melanie as the Americans and her own kids called her, but Meliana. What was in the name? This name goes as far back in Mattie and Susa, Italy from the Roman times it can be found in books written in French and Italian but why did they turn their hearts on their names. Fear, WW II.

This still didn't resolve the shame of 80 years that I needed to work through for myself and my family.

Part1

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