

Chapter One:

The Early Years

It was on May 6, 1921 that I was born into the household of Gennaro and Victoria D'Urso. The first in my family to be born in the United States of America. Gennaro and Victoria left their native home San Nicola, Dell'Alto, Providence Catanzaro, Calabria, Italy in the year of 1919. I was named Eggidio Michael D'Urso after the first born who died in Italy at an early age. The oldest living child was Josephine who was born in Italy.



Fig 1. Grandpa Antonio Spinelli and first born Guelio (1915)

Josephine was three years old when I was born in Brooklyn, New York, USA. Mom's maiden name was Victoria Marie Spinelli. Very little is known of Pop's (Gennaro D'Urso) childhood. From what we can determine he had a brother who was settled somewhere in Brazil, South America. As for Mom's side of the family, almost all of them never left their native homeland in Italy. Pop could read and write and he would correspond regularly with

Mom's family keeping us in close contact with her brother and sisters.



Fig 2. Mom, Victoria & Dad, Gennaro with Eggidio (1) & Josephine (4), (1922)

There were times when Mom would send clothes to her sisters. The people in the old country were under the impression that the streets were lined with gold in America. We had very little but Mom would always find a way to send clothes and money to her brothers and sisters in Italy. Most of the time Pop and Mom sent money because the money seemed to go farther in Italy. On many occasions I found myself going to the local bank to exchange American dollars for Italian liras. Mom kept in touch with her family up to the time she died. Even pop's passing away didn't stop mom from writing to her family. She found someone who could read and write Italian and paid her to write letters to her family and read the letters that returned.

The only other relative that was brave enough to leave his native land was mom's cousin. His name was Michael Cardamone. His grandmother (Maria Spinelli) and my mother (Victoria Spinelli) were sisters.

My dad's mother (Maria Ramo) left him in Italy when he was seven years old and sailed to the United States of America. Many a time my dad told me that in his youth he was forced to clear rocks and stones to have a place to sleep and food to eat.

Apparently he experienced much in the way of hard times during his youth.

After marrying mother (Victoria Spinelli) my father (Gennaro D'Urso) joined the Italian Army in 1916. He was in the African Corps during World War I. Grandma D'Urso (Maria Ramo) had a large portrait of my father in a sheikh outfit. The disappearance of this portrait is a mystery.

Grandma on my father's side (Maria Ramo) was a character. Mom tells us that when they arrived in the new country they stayed with her until they got on their feet. Grandma had control of the monies and was very possessive. This arrangement did not last too long. My mother was too independent to live with this arrangement and so they made a big move and went to the coalmines of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

It was at this time that my brother Anthony (Tony) was born on November 7, 1922. Thank God we did not stay in the coalmine region too long. Father and Mother both agreed that coal mining was not for them and they decided to go back to Brooklyn, New York.

As you probably guessed we moved close to Grandma. I was too young to know if Mom moved near Grandma or visa versa. I can't remember where my father was working at this time but my mother was working in a factory where they made horns for automobiles. The factory was located on Willoughby Street, Brooklyn, NY. We lived on Sandford Street in Brooklyn. It was at this address that my sister Lena was born on September 7, 1925. As a child she had the prettiest blond hair and hazel eyes. Her complexion was fair and every one who saw her loved her. She was very active and we had to watch her closely for if we left her for a second she would be "hanging by the buggy straps".

In 1928 Mom decided she had enough of Grandma and we again moved. This time we moved to 75 Franklin Ave. I was five, Josephine was eight, Tony was four and Lena the youngest was only one. The time we spent at this address was the best. Everybody was gainfully employed and it appeared to me that every one was well fed and clothed. At this time most of the people in our community were Italian immigrants. The language spoken in the home and in the streets was Italian. Similar situations existed for most of the immigrants at this time. Each ethnic group seemed to have their own small communities.

This very often led to distrust between communities. Whenever you left your community you made sure you were not alone. It was best to travel with at least five members of your own

community. I guess it was this distrust that caused many gangs to spring up in and around the city. The distrust of the community was due primarily to the language barrier and also the cultural differences of the people who were emigrating into the U.S.A. from Europe.

Franklin Ave was a nice block and every one kept it clean. Every morning weather permitting they would hose down the sidewalks and stoops. The gutters and the streets were maintained by the Sanitation Department. This was not easy since at this time all deliveries were done by horse and wagon and the streets were littered with horse manure. The cleanup was accomplished by keeping a sanitation man stationed in a given area. His tool of the trade was a large garbage can on wheels, a large shovel and a large broom. With this equipment he walked his area and maintained this area free of litter and manure droppings. They did an excellent job of maintaining the streets and keeping the gutters clean in those days. The only means we had to preserve our perishable foods was the use of a fire escape platform in the winter and the icebox in the summer. Consequently, large amounts of perishables were not stored at home. The items that were stored consisted primarily of milk, butter, eggs, cheese, fruit, home made soda, beer and water. Ice was delivered to the homes by the local Iceman. When the Iceman came into the neighborhood with the horse and wagon all the kids would gather around the wagon and wait until he cut a small block of ice from the larger block. In doing so, small flakes of ice would be scattered around in the wagon. The Iceman would give us permission to pick up the pieces. Boy during the hot summer months in the big city this was cool and quite a treat to us kids! Some times he would also give us a ride in the back of the wagon. The problem with this was that we often had to walk long distances to get home from the spot where he left the wagon.

The house on Franklin Ave was located between Flushing Ave and Park Ave. The Black population lived in the Flushing Avenue area whereas the commercial area was located on Park Avenue. On Park Avenue there was a Barber Shop, combination grocery and meat market, a funeral parlor and a number of other stores. The owner of the grocery store had a son who was sweet on my older sister Josephine. His name was John and he went out of his way to be nice to me. His job in the grocery store was to deliver the groceries to the customers. This was the age of the horse and buggy but John was too young to handle the horse so we had to make all deliveries with a large wagon pushed by

John. It had two big wheels, one on each side and a smaller wheel in the front. John took me with him on all his deliveries. On the way back from the deliveries he would put me in the wagon and push me all the way back to the store.

In the evening when the store was closed it was John's job to scrape the butcher block, sweep the saw-dust from the floor and replace it with new saw-dust. The chopping block had to be scraped to remove all the blood that accumulated on it during the day. The saw-dust was put on the floor to absorb the blood drippings as they fell to the floor during the butchering of the meats. After the chores were completed John would reward me with a box of animal crackers. At night John's father would take the three Italian bull dogs from their pen in the back yard and put them in the store. You can be sure that no one would be crazy enough to try to rob that store! These dogs were huge and ugly! I remember one day when one of the dogs got loose. It took every bullet in the policeman's gun to stop him. It sure was an exciting day from our point of view!

It never came to our attention that John was attracted to my sister during the time we lived on Franklin Ave. They were too young at this time to ever think of going out. My sister and John never dated while we lived on Franklin Ave. My brother Tony and I often went to the Barber Shop located on Park Avenue. The barber, Mr. John Faritona, was an Italian immigrant. He had been living in the U.S.A. for a longer time than my parents and many of the other immigrants. Consequently all the other immigrants all looked up to him for help and advise. Since at this time none of the public schools were teaching English to adults, Mr. Faritona would teach English to many of the immigrants at night. I do not know whether or not he charged for this service.

I am fairly sure that Mr. Faritona had something to do with my father getting his citizenship papers on August 5, 1930. My father was thirty-eight at the time. As for the rest of us Mom was thirty-eight, Josephine was twelve, Tony was eight, Lena was six and I, Eggidio was nine.

Because of the closeness of our ages Tony and I were inseparable. We did everything together. When we went to the barber to get our hair cuts, the barber Mr. Faritona would associate us with Gene Tunney the great boxer of that time. As we entered the shop he would greet us by shouting, "Here come the Gene Tunney boys!"

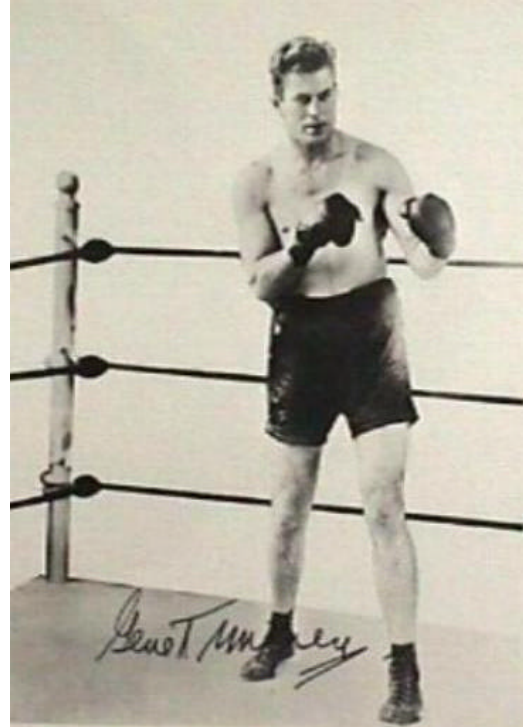


Fig 3. Picture of Gene Tunney the Boxer

The other place I spent a lot of time was the funeral parlor located on Park Ave between Franklin Ave and Skillman Street. The director of the funeral parlor was Mr. Sal Sloan. He had a son Joe who was my age. We spent a lot of afternoons after school at his home. He had a very interesting talking parrot. The parrot's famous words were "Polly wants a cracker" and he kept repeating it until you gave him one. He would repeat all the conversations he heard throughout the day. His vocabulary also consisted of a number of choice words

that cannot be repeated here. I do not know where the parrot heard these words but you can be sure it wasn't from Joe or myself. It was a sad day when I went to Joe's one afternoon and was told that the parrot had died the night before. We decided that it would only be fitting to give the parrot a decent burial. The parrot was put in a shoebox, carefully sealed for burial and buried in the back yard. This is my last memory of Joe.

On the opposite end of Franklin Ave stood a factory. It was owned by Mr. Stimpson and he was a very generous man. At closing time he would gather all the kids of the neighborhood and take us to the local candy store and treat us to ice cream soda's, candy and tennis balls. Still to this day I can not determine if he was really generous or just very shrewd. When ever there was vandalism on the street

it was interesting that it never involved the the Stimpson factory!

At the entrance of the Stimpson factory was a large clock that could be seen from a good distance. When I think of this clock I remember a time when my brother Tony and I were at the local feast and forgot about the time. This feast is a yearly occurrence that took place on Skillman St. As Tony and I approached Franklin Ave we saw the Simpson clock and were shocked to see the time, 12 o' clock. We realized we were in trouble since this was past our curfew. We both entered the apartment to go to the third floor where we lived and knocked on the door. On the other side of the door we heard Mom's voice say "Who is there?". We replied, "It is Tony and Eggidio." My mother's response was, " It can not be my sons they are in bed it's passed their curfew!" Our response was "It is 12 o' clock and we are your sons please let us in!" Mom opened the door, Tony went in first and Mom grabbed him and started to beat him. While Mom was preoccupied with Tony I ran into the house and hid.

Not long after we moved to Franklin Ave Grandma D'Urso moved. She got an apartment on Skillman Street a block away from us. I can recall the times that we spent with Grandma. She was married several times. How many I don't know, however, it seemed that each time she did marry it was to someone who was quite wealthy. Her home would always contain very precious and expensive antiques. When she lived on Skillman Street she was married to the only Grandpa I can remember.

Every Sunday after dinner we would go to visit Grandma and Grandpa. We would be wearing our Sunday outfits walking along Park Avenue going from Franklin Avenue To Skillman Street which was one block away. It was my sisters Josephine and Lena, brother Tony, myself, Mom and last but not least Pop all walking together. It was quite a spectacle for all to see. When Pop walked he stood very tall and proud. You would think he was seven feet tall even though in reality he was only five feet seven.

Whenever we got to Grandma and Grandpa's house we would find Grandma sitting in her favorite rocker and Grandpa doing the chores. The rocker was one of a kind. It started with a normal wooden rocker that was covered over with cushions. She had at least three soft cushions on the seat and another two cushions in the back. Boy when you sat in that rocker it felt like you were in heaven. Grandpa waited on Grandma as though she was a princess. He not only provided the money for their needs, but he also cooked, dusted and did the wash.

If you thought the rocker was something you should have seen the bed. It was at least five feet high requiring a step stool to get in. There were four mattresses on the bed. The bed had a beautiful antique brass headboard with a very expensive blanket and spread. The bedroom room was full of expensive furniture and the windows were covered with drapes matching the spread on the bed.

Of all the antiques Grandma had, the one that impressed me the most was the artificial Christmas tree. It was complete with balls, lights and decorations. The tree was not large it was about three feet high and two feet wide. The tree came out at each Christmas and then would be stored after the holiday with the balls, lights and decorations intact ready for displaying the following year.

It was when we lived on Franklin Ave when I started to learn to speak English. It was not easy but the teachers were very patient and understanding. I was not alone, since most of the children were from immigrant families. It was not easy for all the kids, for they had to speak English in class and the language of their parents when they got home. Somehow we managed to get through it.

I could still remember the times when I would practice my penmanship at night after supper and Mom although she herself could not read or write would give me praise. She would always say "boni! boni!" (good, good). I questioned her one time by asking her "Why do you say its good when you can not read what I have written?" Her reply was "I may not know what it says but by the neatness of your work I rated it!"

My Mom was a great inspiration to me. Although my memory is limited with regard to my early years at school I do remember some highlights. Before we could be registered for school, it was required that we go to the clinic and receive our immunization shots. It was real scary to see that needle when you were only six years old. The small pox vaccination was the worse. It branded you for life. It left you with a round mark about the size of a dime on your upper left arm. After all our shots were taken we registered in Public School 157 located in the middle of the block of Kent Ave between Park Ave and Myrtle Ave. My older sister was registered as Josephine, I was registered as Eugene (What was thought to be the English translation of Eggidio), Tony was registered as Anthony and Lena was registered as Adeline. Somewhere along the line our last name was changed from the original spelling of D'Urso to Durso which appears in all of our papers to date. The change in the spelling came to my

attention when I came across Pop's citizenship papers which reads D'Urso.

I will always remember my first day in school because my teacher was very pretty and her beauty was to become the cause of me losing my first baby teeth before they were due to fall out. It happened one afternoon when she was dismissing the class. I was walking forward with my head turned around looking at the teacher and when I turned around fast my teeth met with the steel lamp post!

The other thing I remember was that in the first couple of years of schooling I was chubby and my brother Tony was skinny. Being chubby and well mannered the teachers made a big fuss over me (they seemed to like chubby kids back then). There was one teacher who would like to squeeze my cheeks and take me to lunch. In second grade I met a nice girl named Ruth. She lived on Bedford Ave between Park Ave and Myrtle Ave. Her parents had a pastry store where they sold bread and all kinds of cakes and pastry. I walked her home from school and when we got to the store she gave me cookies. It was hard to tell if I liked Ruth for herself or the cookies.

In 1929 we had the great depression that affected all our lives. Jobs were getting scarce and the good times were coming to an end for all of us. I guess we were lucky since Pop was still working. Pop was a laborer and he and others like him worked ten hours a day six days a week with Sundays off. This didn't really give us much time to get to know our father. On Franklin Avenue we had the trolley car at our doorsteps it could take us to Prospect Park and Coney Island. The trolley in the summer was all open which made it possible to get into the trolley on either side. There was a trainman and a conductor on the trolley. The trainman operated the trolley and the conductor walked from the front to the rear of the trolley on a platform on the side of the trolley collecting fares from the passengers as they got on.

The Prospect Park in those days was beautiful with the grass and trees well tended by the caretakers. The people took great pride in their park. When we went to the park, we would pack a picnic lunch with all the goodies. It was a full day outing. There was no swimming but there was a nice zoo and a lake. At the lake there were canoes and rowboats you could rent by the hour. For your entertainment a band would be playing all the popular music of the day.

If you wanted to go swimming in the ocean and at the same time have access to a picnic area and an amusement park, there was no better place than Coney Island.



Fig 4. Coney Island (Late 1920's)

Many of our famous comedians started in Coney Island.



Fig 5. Young Jimmy Durante

Jimmy Durante was one. Coney Island was also famous for the highest ferris wheel, longest boardwalk, Luna Park, Steeplechase and not to forget Nathan's hot dogs. To make sure we would have a table and barbecue in the picnic area at Coney Island, the men and their sons would leave early in the morning by horse and wagon to the picnic area. I mean early in the morning! It was dark when we loaded the wagon with food, pots and wood required for the barbecue. It seemed to me that we were in the dark for a long time before we saw daybreak. I will never forget those days. It was quite something to hear the hoof beats of the horse in the quiet of the early morning. Once we got to the picnic area the men got every thing ready for the women who would

arrive by trolley. This was one example of good community activity that existed at this time.

For entertainment we had the silent movies and if you were lucky you had a record player. The record player had to be wound up by hand. The record player was our treasured possession, it was made of dark mahogany and it was our job to keep it highly polished. When you opened the cover protecting the turn table the first thing you saw was a dog and a large hearing horn. This was and still is the RCA trademark. Whenever there was a get together you could be sure that the record player was being played. Pop had many records of the latest polka's and Waltz's. Most of the records were RCA Victor which were considered to be the best. Tony and I took turns winding up the record player by turning a handle which was on the side. Once the record player was wound it was good for at least two records.

The Italians didn't need a special occasion to have a party. All that was required was some friends. This happened at least twice a month. Pop and Mom were great dancers. and showed their stuff at all the get-to-gethers.

The movie theater was located on Myrtle Ave. between Skillman St. and Bedford Ave. Most of the movies shown were silent and they featured mostly Westerns. A piano player was always in the theater to provide the sound effects of a chase, sad moments, the fights, and of course the love scenes. Some of famous cowboys were, Tom Mix and his horse Tony, Hoot Gibson, Ken Maynard, Ted Steel

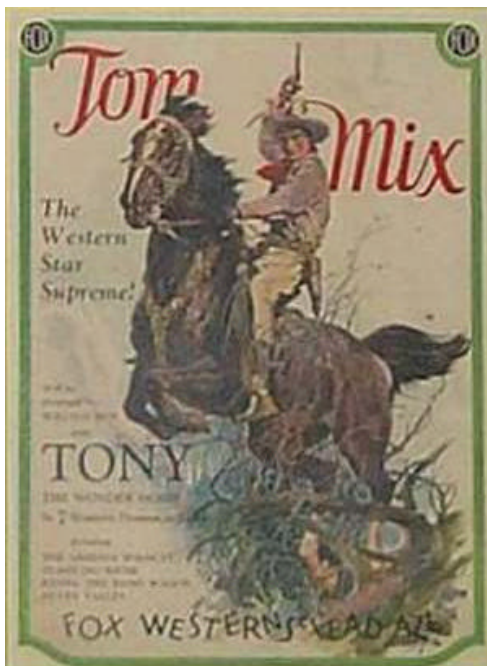


Fig 6. Memorabilia Photo from Tom Mix and Horse Tony

and Tex Ritter. The theater was small so to accommodate all the people they introduced a system where they limited you to seeing the movie only once.

Tickets were sold at all times and if you bought a ticket while the feature was about finishing up, they would give you a half check. When the feature was over the house lights would come on and the ushers would go up and down the aisles checking for the half checks. The people without the half checks had to leave the theater. Whenever this happened Tony and I would hide in the rest room and get to see the movie twice. The entrance fee at that time was five cents and we got to see two features and one comedy.

It was while we lived on Franklin Ave that Mom's cousin Michael Cardamone came to the U.S.A. from Italy. He stayed with us for short time and then he went on his own. Michael met Miss Aurelia Angotti through mutual friends and they were married within the year on April 27, 1930. It was the same year that Pop was to become an American citizen. They had a big church wedding with a reception afterwards. Because of prohibition they could not serve any alcoholic beverage but if you looked hard enough you could find some good home made wine, beer and whiskey at the reception. The Italian weddings were conducted just as it was in the old country. It was customary to visit the bride and groom's apartment before they got married and enter their bedroom and deposit some money on the bed for their luck and fruitful harvest. When I visited cousin Michael and Aurelia's bedroom, the bedspread was full of green backs. It was some sight to behold.

Another custom of the Italians is to give cash at weddings so that the wedding couples could get a good start in making a home for themselves. When a gown is being sewed for the bride a "borsa" (a pouch in English) is also made from the same cloth of the gown. This pouch would be with the bride throughout the wedding reception and as the gifts were received from the guest, they were put in the pouch. The highlight of the wedding is the Grand March. It is hard to describe it. You have to see it to appreciate it. All the guests are in the march.

There was no law against making the hard liquor and beer in your home provided you did not sell it. My Pop made wine, beer and soda. The soda flavors were cream and root beer. Of the two the root beer was the best. The beer was made with hops and

malt. The beer was good but you had to be careful when you poured it from the bottle because no matter how long you fermented the brew and skimmed the beer during fermentation you always had some sediment settling at the bottom of the bottle. The making of the beer and soda was straight forward and it is not as colorful as when it was time to make the wine.

Wine making started in the fall of the year when the grapes were coming to wholesale market. The market we went to was the Wallabout Market located on Flushing Ave, Brooklyn, NY. In addition to fruits and vegetables the market also sold cold cuts, can foods, Cheeses, olive oil and coffee, domestic and from all over the world. As soon as we knew the grapes were in, we went to the market by trolley. Once we got there we went from one wholesale dealer to another to compare quality and price of the grapes. This part of the process was something to witness, an auction cannot compare with the bickering that goes on before a sale is made. It seem to me that every time you went out to buy anything regardless what it was you always had to barter the price before a sale could be made. At no time did you ever purchase anything at the first price quoted. Once the grapes were purchased we had to make provisions to get the grapes home. At the market there always were horse and wagons available with drivers. The bickering would starts all over again and finally we get the grapes home.

The grapes would be packed in wooden crates and separated by color. The color of the grapes would determine the color of the wine. Pop would purchase just the right amount and type of grapes which when combined would produce a red dry burgundy wine. The first process was to crush the grapes and store them in seasoned wood barrels. As the crates were being emptied we would take them in the back yard and started to make a clubhouse. It was a lot of fun even though we knew the clubhouse was temporary. The grapes were left in the barrels for certain length of time to ferment and then it would come time to press the grapes to wine. As the wine flowed from the press it was collected and put into the same barrels the crushed grapes were in originally. The wine had to pass through very fine filters before it entered the barrels. During this process of making the wine we all seemed to become cheap drunks, taking samples as we went. It would be at least two months before the wine would be ready to drink. In all the years of wine making Pop always made sure the wine would be ready in time for the Christmas holidays.

At Christmas time Tony and I delivered a gallon of wine to the friends of our family and of course our one and only cousin Michael Cardamone who lived on Skillman Street. We had to be careful when we delivered the wine because if we got stopped by a policeman we could be accused of selling the wine which was illegal during prohibition. In addition to sharing the wine at Christmas time we also interchanged cakes and cookies that were made in the same way they were made in the old country. The wines and pastry would become objects of hot debate as to who made the best wine and pastry. For the wine they would compare the color, taste and weight. Since every one made their own wine it was with great pride that each one thought their wine was the best. The same thing went for the women when they compared their cakes, pies and pastry. You can be sure that no one ever won out.

Every Saturday night after six days of hard work the neighbors would get together. The ones who played an instrument brought them and others brought food and drink and they all had a very joyous time. The children also enjoyed these evenings. The music they played was from their former home in Italy. The musical instruments generally consisted of a guitar, mandolin and of course the accordion which was the favorite. With a mixture of wine and song every one had a good time.

Another way my parents entertained themselves was to play cards. They played two games, one was called "Breeck" (in Italian) and the other was named "Scopare" (Italian word meaning sweep) I never saw my parents play for money. They generally played for wine or pastry. The winner of the game was the boss and the loser was the under boss. The boss was in charge of distributing the wine or pastry to whoever he chose but had to get approval from the under boss. The boss and under boss would argue back and forth and if there was no agreement the boss had to drink the wine and eat the pastry himself.

I remember one night that my Pop was so stubborn that he drank all the wine himself because him and the under boss could not agree as to whom to give the wine. Of course if on that particular night pastry were involved, the same approach would be used.

On Sunday we all got dressed to attend mass at Saint Lucy Catholic church located in Kent Avenue between Park Avenue and Flushing Avenue. Pop with his fancy suit and felt hat and Mom with her fur collar winter coat and hat. They sure made a fine looking couple. In the summer time Pop wore

his fancy straw hat. It was flat on the top and had a wide brim. The only problem with this hat was that a strong wind could easily blow the hat off your head and because of its shape the wind would make it roll along the ground at a high speed making you chase it for a great distance before you retrieved it.

It was one summer day when we were walking to Grandma's a gust of wind lifted Pops straw hat from his head and rolled it along the ground with Pop chasing after it. That was the last time I saw Pop wearing his flat straw hat.

In the winter Pop wore a vest with pockets and in one of the pockets he had a gold pocket watch. From the watch a gold chain hung and went to the opposite pocket of the vest which was attached to a locker. The locker when opened had a picture of the first son Eggidio on one side and on the other side was a picture of Mom's father (my Grandpa, Antonio Spinelli). The vest with the gold chain, watch and locker was very impressive and Pop wore it proudly.

Franklin Ave had a trolley running through it. It had two sets of tracks for the trolley to go both ways on their own separate tracks. The rest of the street was lined with cobblestones. Most of the streets were lined with cobblestones. At this time most of the travel and delivery was done by horse driven wagons and carriages. In the winter when they operated closed trolleys with only the operator on the car, we would hitch a ride in the back of the trolley and remove the spring-loaded boom to the electrical source and run away as fast as we could. This would stop the trolley and it would require that the operator get off the trolley and replace the boom to the electric cable. This cable was located just above the trolley and ran for the whole distance of the trolley run. The house we lived in at Franklin Avenue was a three family dwelling. The landlord and owner of the building lived on the first floor, we lived on the top floor and there was a tenant on the second floor. Most of the flats at this time were not central heated, hence the name, Cold Flats. Also most of the flats had what they called railroad rooms. This meant that to get to the front room from the back room you had to pass thru all the rooms in the house. The kitchen was usually the back room and it faced the back yard and the front room faced the street. The kitchen was where we cooked, ate, entertained and bathed. In the kitchen we had a coal stove that provided us with heat and enabled us to bake and cook. Also if we were lucky we would find a sink with a wash tub, an upright gas stove (no oven), gas water heater tank (this was not thermostatically controlled and the water was heated

as required) and if you were one of the rare few you would have a bathroom of your own.

In most flats you had to share a bathroom with your other tenants. On Franklin Avenue we were lucky we had our own bathroom. Bathtubs were scarce. To get a bath you went to public baths or climbed in the washtub in the kitchen.

The kitchen was where Mom and Pop and their friends played cards and entertained. The remaining rooms were used for bedrooms only. We had no living room and dining room, as a matter of fact I didn't even know they existed! No one we knew had them. The only one that came close was my Grandma. She had a leather sofa in one of her rooms at Skillman Street.

Of all the tenants and people we knew the only one who put up a Christmas tree was our landlord. Every Christmas we would be invited to see the tree all lit up with lights and decorated with colorful balls and tinsels. It was one of the most beautiful sights to behold.

In the thirties the women were starting to work at home to supplement their husbands salary. Some women crochet tassels for window shades and others worked on putting snaps on bead necklaces. The beads were threaded by machines but the snaps were put on by hand. Mom was one of the women who chose to work with beads. The beads was very popular with the women at this time and there were many beads to be worked on. This kept my Mom and most of the neighbors busy. The beads were picked up and returned to a store located a block away on Kent Avenue. I remember many a night going with my Mom helping her to return the beads to the store. Mom was the only one in our household who worked on the beads at this time. Josephine, Tony, Lena and myself were still able to enjoy playing together. Even though we were doing well with respect to shelter, clothing and food we did not have additional money for such things as scooters and pull wagons.

This did not stop us from owning them for we made them from old carriages and roller skates that were discarded in the trash by the wealthier people in the area. From the carriage we took the useable axles and wheels and made our wagon. Everyone on the block had a wagon. Each wagon had its own personal touches. Tony and I really dressed up our wagon we had a steering wheel and stream lined it and of course we painted it. Yes it was fireman red! We raced them down all the streets that had a good incline and some times we raced them with someone pushing. Tony and I took turns

pushing and of course when we were not pushing we were driving.

From the roller skates we made scooters. It took only one skate to make a scooter. You took an orange crate placed it on its side and nailed a 1' x 4" x 4' feet long board to it. You then took one skate and separated the two sets of wheels. One set was attached to the board at the crate and the other set was attached to the end of the board. Of course each scooter was stream lined and painted to ones own taste. You can be sure that we also raced these scooters. These scooters were very noisy and we had to find a smooth street to ride on. The best street was Kent Avenue opposite Saint Lucy's church. The priest was not too happy with the noise and he would very often chase us away. I don't blame him but it sure made us mad when he kept us away from the best block for our scooters.

From what I have written it seems that all we did was play and have fun. This is not true for we did spend a good amount of time studying and reading. About five or six blocks from our home there was a free library it was known as the Pratt Institute and it was located in the brown stone section of Brooklyn. This section was comprised of one family attached houses with central heat and private toilets. Complete with hot and cold running water to the bath tub and showers. Each house was enclosed by a very high wrought iron fence with a fancy gate. The gate usually had the name of the owner and the street number in gold. The rest of the gate and fence was painted black. The library was privately owned and was part of a professional college specializing in the Arts. It was a unique college library, in that it had a large portion of the library devoted to the children in the neighborhood. I spent a lot of time at this library and when it closed I always took some books home to read.

The best place to read in the winter was in the kitchen next to the coal stove. The kitchen was the hottest room in the flat. It was at this time that I realized that the stories my Mom told us were in the books I was now reading. Remember my Mom was from Italy. Apparently all the fables and tales I read when I was growing up were originally told to the people by storytellers of the past throughout the world in their native language. Not everyone was fortunate to know how to read and write and they were grateful for the storytellers. In many cases the storyteller was your mother. I can still remember those cold nights when my brother, sisters and myself gathered around the coal stove as our mother told us the universal tales and fables.

In the summer months of July and August when the school was closed we were not fortunate enough to belong to a swimming pool so when it got too hot we would open one of the "Johnny-Pumps" (fire hydrants) and cool off. To get a high spray of water we would get behind the "Johnny-Pump" and place a flat board under the nozzle opening. By moving the board we could control the spray of the water over the bathers head. Once in a while the board would get away and when this happened the board would shoot out like a bullet into the crowd. The crowd was always aware of this possibility and therefore were always on alert. The opening of the "Johnny-Pump" was against the law and it kept the police very busy. No sooner did they close the pumps when they were re-opened. To avoid this problem the police introduced a controlled sprinkler system in certain designated areas. The sprinkler system was connected to the "Johnny-Pump" and was turned on and off by the police at specific intervals. Tony and I went to the one that was located on Skillman Street. It so happened that this was the block where Grandma lived.

It was sometime in 1930 that we again decided to move. I don't know the reason, however, it might have been due fact that the depression was taking its toll. We moved to a lower rent flat which was only one block west of Franklin Avenue. The flat was on Kent Avenue between Park Avenue and Myrtle Avenue. The school we were attending was just across the street. The structure contained 10 residencies with two on each floor. There was only one bathroom which on each floor which had to be shared by the two tenants on that floor. Each tenant had its own door entering into the bathroom. Whenever the bathroom was occupied the door to the adjacent flat would be closed for privacy. After using the bathroom you were required to unlock the door to the adjacent flat. As you might expect problems often arose when someone forgot to unlock the door.

A funny story seemed to develop from this arrangement. As the story goes "If a wife was seeing a lover and the husband came home early, the lover could always exit through the bathroom and through the adjacent flat." This escape would only work, however, if the family residing in the adjacent flat was in on it since the door from the bathroom to the adjacent flat was normally locked from the outside.

In the back of our building there were horse stalls and a area set aside for parking the horse drawn wagons. During the day, while the wagons were being used, children would play in this area. In the evening the horse and wagons would return and the wagons would be parked at their respective areas

and the horses returned to their stalls and fed. We were allowed to watch the horses being returned to the stall and if we were lucky and the owner was in a good mood we were also given the opportunity to ride the horses into the stalls.

It was in the winter of 1930 when we all experience the scare of our lives. Pop got very sick and was forced to remain in bed. We were forced to seek help from the government in the form of what was called "Home Relief". We received support in the form of money for rent and also food. The food had to be picked up each week at the local police precinct. Our precinct was located about four blocks away at Classon and DeKalb Ave's. Once a week it was my job to go for the food. This was done during my lunch break from school. When released from school I would take the homemade wagon and a large burlap bag and head for the police precinct. The pick up spot for the food was on the sixth floor. Going up was not too bad but going down with a full load was quite a chore. The food would be shoveled into the burlap bag. First they would shovel in the potatoes and then some canned foods (usually corned beef and prunes). I was only nine years old and it was quite a stunt to drag the bag along the ground to the fire escape. Then down 5 stories to the ground floor. There was usually someone on the ground floor who would help me put the bag in the wagon. It was a good thing since at this point I was just about to drop! When I arrived home, mom would always see to it that I did not have to unload the wagon. To keep warm in the winter the government also issued us 100 pounds of coal a week. The coal also had to be picked up at the local police precinct. This pick-up wasn't bad since we could do it on Saturdays.

With Pop being sick and finances low we started working at home. Mom had been doing some work at home prior to this but this was more to keep herself busy and was not a necessity. Mom worked so

that she could have some "mad money" as she would call it. But with Pop being ill working at home was becoming a real necessity. In fact it very quickly got to the point where all of us needed to pitch in and help. Josie, Tony and I would put the snaps on the beads and Mom would finish them off by tying the knots. The tying of the knots was difficult because you had to maintain the proper tension of the thread holding the beads. When we got home we would first do our schoolwork and then we would be assigned our quota. We had to meet our quota before we could go to bed. At this time we had no radio to amuse us so Mom would tell us stories and tales.

One of our favorites was the story of the three Princes. As the story goes the King had to choose a successor to the throne. He brought his three sons together and advised them that he was going to send them out to tend the sheep at night and that the one who could tend the sheep all night with out losing any of the sheep to the wolves would be King. The oldest son went first and he failed. The second son also failed. The youngest son succeeded where his older brothers failed. Both of the older brothers could not stay awake and while they were sleeping the wolves killed the sheep. The young Prince also was sleepy but he was smart. To keep from going to sleep he put his sword under his chin and whenever he dozed off his chin would drop on the point of the sword and he would be awakened. This story was told many times especially when the night was getting long and we were getting sleepy. In most of Mom's stories the young son or daughter was always smarter. Her stories made the time pass quickly. Tony was always able to finish his work fast at which time he would then help me with my quota. In this way we could both go to bed together. With the aid of the government and this additional work at home we managed to live somewhat comfortably.