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Vincenzia and Paul Frontiero
- photo courtesy of Frontiero Family
Frontiero Family Memories as told by Virginia Frontiero McKinnon

My Frontiero cousins have been encouraging me to write some of my early memories of our family. My cousin Janet, visiting from Washington, DC, was instrumental in getting our family together for a family reunion. Her dad, my Uncle Vito, was the last living member and had recently died. Michael Frontiero, my dad, had six other siblings: Joseph, Mary, Rosalie, Sam, Rose, and Virginia “Vincie.” We gathered at Stage Fort Park for the reunion on August 9, 2009 and have continued to keep in touch.
I enjoy relating some of the stories my dad told me. My grandfather Paulo Francisco Frontiero was born in 1875 in Terrasini, province of Palermo in Sicily. As a little boy he had a little red cart, which he proudly dragged around with him everywhere. Maybe picking up a fish at the dock or garden produce from a neighbor. He was nicknamed “Paulido Carattere” ("Paul with the Little Cart") These items he brought home helped feed his parents, brothers, and sisters.

In Sicily, my grandfather Paulo was a fisherman. Often as a young man missionaries would request to accompany him on his fishing trips from Sicily to the coast of Africa. They would sprinkle holy water on the natives, my grandfather would say “Acqua Persosa, Acqua Persosa” translated “Wasted Water, Wasted Water,” as he did not believe these natives could ever be converted to Christianity. The missionaries were delighted, believing my grandfather was offering prayers in their native tongue.

My grandfather married my grandmother Vincenzia Ciarametaro in Terrasini, Sicily. He came to America together with his seven siblings: Rosa, Maria Antoinette, Mateo, Vincenza, Salvatore, Nino, and Faro. It is possible he landed in New York before settling in Boston. Once they found homes in America, each sibling returned to Sicily, and then accompanied their families to America. In America my grandfather learned to speak fluent English and found a job as a foreman in a rubber factory. My dad, Michael, was born in Boston in 1902 at Sun Court, next to Paul Revere’s House in the North End.

My dad’s sister, Anna Maria, became ill with rheumatic fever. Her doctor advised the family to move to a warmer climate, so the family returned to Sicily when she was about 3 years old. As Anna Maria’s health improved, they returned to America. This was in time for my dad to be educated here but just until 6th grade when he left school to help support his family as a fisherman on my grandfather’s boat, “The Virginia and Mary.” My father continued to fish and married
my mother, Mary Piscitello in 1928. They had five children: Virginia Frontiero McKinnon (author), Paul Frontiero, Rosalie Frontiero Doucette, Ida Frontiero Doane and Mary Ann Frontiero Beaton (twins).

MARY PISCITELLO AND MICHAEL FRONTIERO, NEW YEAR’S DAY, 1928

1952 FRONTIERO FAMILY: ROSALIE (DOUCETTE), PAUL, DAD, MICHAEL, AUTHOR VIRGINIA (MCKINNON), TWIN SISTERS, MARY ANN (BEATON) AND IDA (DOANE) AND MOM, MARY (PISCITELLO) FRONTIERO

MICHAEL FRONTIERO ON THE F/V LITTLE FLOWER, 1958.
My grandparents, Paulo and Vincenzia Frontiero, lived “down the fort” at 13 Beach Court, the first house on the right just before Pavilion Beach. The house was a duplex, having a large front porch, first floor kitchen and my grandparent’s bedroom. Upstairs there were two bedrooms one for the girls and one for the boys. The bathroom was in the basement. My grandfather Nano was a day fisherman, returning home every evening. My grandmother Nona would feed the children supper. She waited for my Nano to return home from his fishing trip to share their meal together, eating from the same dish.

My dad told me this story of his little brother, Sam. He would sit on the beach daily, waiting to see my Nano’s boat on the horizon. When he saw the boat, he would be so overjoyed and only then would he run home to have supper with his parents. Sam was so angelic, blond with curly hair. Sadly, Sam died at a young age. Nona named her next son Sam, but he also did not survive. Finally, the third Sam lived to a good old age. He was captain and owner of the F/V Lady in Blue and several more Gloucester fishing vessels.

My Uncle Joe’s son was the late Paul Frontiero, a famous Gloucester artist. My Uncle Sam’s son Paul today owns the whale watch boat Privateer operating from Seven Seas Wharf in Gloucester. My brother, also Paul Frontiero, was the first to graduate from college, Brown University, and was a professional engineer for 40 years with IBM. In his retirement playing his trombone, he had his own sassy brassy Jazz Band, “Who’s Your Daddy,” while residing in Raleigh, North Carolina. He returned to Gloucester in November 2020.
My first recollection of my Nona, Vincenzia, was of her wearing peasant like clothing, long cotton skirts, loose blouses and always an apron. Carrying on the Sicilian custom of naming their first child in honor of their grandparents I was given this honor. My mother tried to translate “Vincenzia” to English and called me Virginia. Each of my dad’s siblings had a daughter named Virginia and a son named Paul.

My father often told me his mother was very loving and kind. I remember going to Nona’s home with my him: she always greeted me so affectionately. On one visit she was upset, stating she had nothing to give me. She gave my cousin, also Virginia, a nickel to go to the corner store to buy some apples for me. On another occasion my dad said she tried to hug me, but I pulled away and cried. Next morning Nona was at my door at 6 am, as she feared she had hurt me. She said she was not able to sleep all night.

PAUL FRONTERO PLAYING HIS TROMBONE AT A CONCERT IN RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA. HE FIRST TOOK LESSONS WITH TONY GENTILE FOR GLOUCESTER HIGH SCHOOL BAND, THEN AT BROWN UNIVERSITY, IN PROVIDENCE, R.I AND IN HIS RETIREMENT IN SIENNA, ITALY.
My dad told me sometimes they had a “broker,” meaning they had not caught enough fish to pay for expenses and no money for the crew to take home. After a few of these trips, their home would be depleted of all food and money. My Nona would come up with a hidden twenty-dollar bill. Oh, what joy! Enough money to buy a barrel of flour and enough food to stock up the cellar until the next profitable fishing trip.

My beautiful grandmother died at age 53, just before my third birthday. My dad said his sisters cared for his younger siblings with great devotion, as they all grieved the loss of their mother at an incredibly young age. My grandfather Paulo remained in his home on Beach Court and passed away at age 81. My Aunt Vincie remained at home to care for him.

I remember visiting Nano often. St. Peter’s Fiesta was so special because he lived just down the street from the Fiesta. All the family would gather at our Nano’s home. All the aunts, uncles and cousins getting together to celebrate our special holiday and to view the fireworks from the upstairs bedroom window. The firework display was on Pavilion Beach with many beautiful set pieces on the beach, finishing with the American flag and singing of the Star-Spangled Banner.

My grandfather’s children gave him one of the first television sets. He loved to watch the Westerns. He would be so proud of himself, when he would warn the cowboys that a villain was nearby. He honestly believed the cowboys could hear him! His TV was such good company for him. Sometimes he would take the train into Boston to buy his Italian coffee beans in the North End. He had a little wooden hand coffee grinder to prepare each cup of coffee.

A favorite memory was when my grandfather asked me to accompany him on the electric trolley car around Cape Ann. He carried a green wine bottle filled with water and a little brown bag. He said he wanted to visit Plum Cove, as he believed he would be able to pick some plums there. We so
enjoyed the trolley ride, he soon forgot all about the plums. The cost of that unforgettable 26-mile ride around Cape Ann was only five cents.

I remember visiting grandfather the day he became a United States citizen at age 65. He was so proud of learning to write his name. He took his pen and paper, drawing each letter so carefully writing “Paulo Francisco Frontiero.” He then gave the pen to me and asked me to write my name, which I did with no effort. He was so proud of me, being able to write with such ease.

**Frontiero Family Ancestry**

Great-grandfather Giuseppe Fronte’ri born 1835 Terrasini, province of Palermo, Sicily. 

Name was changed to Frontierro or Frontiero

First married Rosa Palazollo- Children: Faro, Nino, Salvatore, and Paul (my grandfather.)

Rosa died in childbirth. Then married Anna Maria Favazza- Children: Rosa, Marie Antoinette, Matteo and Vincenzia

All 8 siblings Faro, Nino, Salvatore, my grandfather Paul, Rosa, Marie Antoinette, Matteo and Vincenzia came to America together.

All returned to Sicily, returning to America with their families, except Faro, who also returned to Sicily for his wife and children but upon returning to America, was denied entry. His son had an eye infection. He returned to Sicily and never came back to America. Faro now resides in France.
Virginia Frontiero McKinnon

Virginia Frontiero McKinnon writer and Licensed Social Worker has been published in the Gloucester Daily Times, Good Morning Gloucester, Cape Ann TV’s Fish Tales, and Stroke Connection Magazine. A 1947 Gloucester High School graduate, Virginia also attended classes at North Shore Community and Endicott College.

Her career includes District Manager of World Book Encyclopedia, Home Visitor and Educational Coordinator for Action’s Early Childhood Programs, presently Pathways for children, Care Manager/Social Worker at Senior Care, Inc. from which she retired in 2002. Virginia began her writing at the Senior Center’s Memoir program and The Gloucester Writer’s Center, as her passion is to record her family’s history and events in her life. A participant in the Veterans Writing Workshop at the Gloucester Veteran’s Center for the past four years, she was challenged to write the story of her husband’s adventures in the United States Navy during WWII. The Inner Voices of the Outer World, a publication of the workshop writings includes three of her stories and two poems.

Virginia is the daughter of a Gloucester Fisherman, Michael Frontiero. She is the mother of seven children, grandmother of eight and great-grandmother of nine.

For many years she was a lector and Eucharistic Minister at Holy Family Parish and Saint Peter’s Parish. She enjoys watching the beautiful sunsets from her home in East Gloucester.

Virginia celebrated 65 years of marriage with her husband, Robert McKinnon, before he sadly died of aspiration pneumonia on January 10, 2019.