

Antonio Serri

October 6, 2015

RG-50.030*0838

Abstract

Antonio Serri was born October 8, 1928 in Venice, Italy in a family with an older sister and, later, two younger brothers. After Antonio was born, his father worked in the US and his mother and his grandmother brought him up. His grandmother directed the household and was his biggest influence. The Germans occupied Italy in '41 and his grandmother saved him when they were picking out teenage boys to kill in revenge of a missing German. During the last 18 months of the war, Antonio worked in the nearby Arsenal using a file and secretly fixing guns for the Partisans. One incident impressed him when his grandmother hid six Jewish men overnight who were running away from the Germans. He hopes they succeeded. After the war, he came to the US with his family, served in the Korean War, got married and worked for a family friend from Venice for 10 years in the light fixture business.

Summary

- 00:00 Antonio Serri was born October 8, 1928 in Venice, Italy in a family with two younger brothers, Johnny, 20 years younger and Amerigo who was born in the US and an older sister, Yolanda who was 19 months older and born in 1927. After Antonio was born, his father worked in the US and his mother, Elissa Delangia (?) and his grandmother, Moira, brought him up. His father worked as a butler for a rich family in New York City and traveled back and forth between Italy and the US. His father was from Sardinia and had no contact with those relatives. His mother's side was Venetian. Moira's father's brother and the father's sister lived in Sardinia. Antonio's father came to Venice to work as a guide. Every month he sent \$100 home from America to Antonio's mother. The grandmother always lived with them.
- 05:00 They lived in Costello (?), Venice, a nice part of the city where everyone knows one another. Their address was 1602 Pedrocchi Calle (Street). It was the old part near the ships. The German command was there during the war. He walked everywhere and did not use the canals though lived close to them. He lived in a 3-bedroom apartment with a big kitchen and a big modern bathroom on the 3rd floor. There was no elevator. They had a beautiful view of the water. There were just two apartments, one above them on the 4th floor and their apartment. Beneath them were stairs. They knew the upstairs neighbors. It was a couple in the small apartment who were a little strange. Antonio said he was young when he lived there and they had a good time.
- 10:00 It was a poor neighborhood with no rich people. He had cousins nearby but they were not close cousins. One had a vegetable stand and another owned a bar. Few friends visited the family. The family was Catholic and went to Church every Sunday. His

grandmother prayed in the garden. His mother seemed less religious than his grandmother. His mother was plain and good. She did not holler or scream and was not mean and never got mad as was calm. His grandmother was a "bull fire" as she managed and helped others even if she had no money. His grandfather, Delfino or Dolphin, was also top notch but he died young when Antonio was four or five. When it was raining, Delfino took him fishing on his boat. He was tough, big and strong. His grandmother ran the household. She kissed him and everybody. His mother hardly kissed or talked. His grandmother was the greatest influence. She cleaned and shopped and cooked. She told his mother what to do. Fishing was his grandfather's occupation. They lived on the 3rd floor so when his grandmother finished shopping, she did the cooking.

- 15:00 His mother rented the apartment. His grandmother had no money. They were friendly with the neighbors but not close. Antonio had lots of friends from all over the neighborhood. Most were Catholic and there were a few Jews. He went to church with his brother and sister but not with his mother. He was not very religious but prayed at night, had communion and was confirmed. At thirteen he finished elementary school, three years of high school and studied to be a sea captain so he could run a ship. In '41 everything went crazy in Venice as the Germans came and took over. The Germans asked the Jews to move so they all left Venice. The war started in '39. It was a placid atmosphere in his neighborhood. There were mixed feelings about Mussolini. At first they liked him but when the Fascists joined up with Hitler, there was torturing and killing so they changed their attitude toward him. The Partisans were against the Fascists. Mussolini told Hitler that it was all right to get rid of the Jews.
- 20:00 It was miserable but some liked him. Antonio played cards with a Jewish friend. A store sold coffee and candy and, as a kid, he stole candy from the store. The owner was Jewish and knew it but was afraid to say anything. The owner came back after the war and returned to the store. Antonio worked for a rich Jew who ran away to Switzerland and England. Many Venetian Jewish women were sent to concentration camps. Mario Canerino (?) came to the US and he worked for him as his father knew him. Antonio was in the Korean War and got out and his father sent him to Mario Canerino (?) and he worked 10 years for him. Canerino was very wealthy, in the glass business. The wives worked to survive. Canerino had a chauffeur. His business was lighting fixtures, the same as in Venice on the Grand Canal.
- 25:00 Canerino was the name of the business. Canerino took a train from Switzerland to England in 1940 or '41. The Germans came, like the Allies, but they destroyed men so everyone was afraid. The newspaper said nothing but nasty rumors occurred so all the Jews in the neighborhood disappeared. The Partisans were tortured by the Italian Fascists on the streets in Venice. His mother, grandma and the priest did not talk about it as they were not political. The Germans killed the police so they had to be careful how they

walked and talked. The Germans occupied Italy, not the Allies. Antonio worked in the yards so saw the Germans. He fixed old guns for the Partisans. They called him "Nino."

- 30:00 This work was not part of his job in the arsenal. He met a large guy and told him he was good and fixed the guns without questions. It was on Calipadunki Street. A German got drunk in the canal. He did not respond to the roll call so they thought he was fishing. They rounded up Antonio and others in a ten block area and took seven men. They came to his house as they were taking 16 to 18 year olds. His grandmother went down on her knees and cried and said, "Let him go, he's too young" and they let him go. They took one out of every hundred, a total of seven and put them against the wall and shot them. The drunken soldier had fallen into the canal so they killed seven boys for nothing. That frightened everyone. If he was older, he could have been in that group. He had the job in the arsenal as his father could not make any money.
- 35:00 They checked that he could file and he worked for 18 months at the end of the war at age 16 and 17. He was able to use the file. Antonio finished school at age 13 so he was no longer in school. He also worked at other jobs. The Arsenal was the German command. It was two blocks from home. The Germans checked on his shop that they were working. He was young and not afraid. He did not know what he was doing and just did it. A Partisan guy appeared and left. His grandfather had died. His sister got married and moved. Antonio lived with his mother and grandmother. One day in October around 7 or 8 o'clock, there were six men in the kitchen wearing overcoats and carrying suitcases. His grandma said, "Sh." At 6 AM they would take the train. They were probably Jewish men running away from the Germans. There were no women or children so maybe they mixed with the population. All the Jews were strangers. He saw them once. His grandma did not speak about it.
- 40:00 His grandma always helped others. She was poor so borrowed money from someone to help others. His grandma never spoke of the six men after the war. She was a wonderful woman. Whoever rang the bell for him, she would say that he was busy. He worked 18 months at the arsenal. After the war, his father who was a US citizen, applied for all to come to the US. Antonio came with his brother and mother in '46 and served in Korea and became a citizen after he got out. When the war ended in '45, bells were rung all over Venice. They were liberated by the English. All of a sudden, the Germans ran away. There was a bomb on the desk where his mother cleaned. The British stayed a short while. The man with the candy store returned. Antonio's brother visited Venice and told him the store was still there.
- 45:00 His grandma had remained in Italy. His sister and husband moved into the apartment with her. One day the sister called that the grandma, Moira Delangia, had died. It was around '50 or '51. Bullet holes were still in the wall where they shot the people. Everyone came to America. There were no problems. Antonio wanted to be by himself. They lived in

Greenwich, Connecticut, where his father was a butler for a wealthy family. They had a large apartment. Antonio had several jobs. He worked at a gas station and cleaned venetian blinds. He went twice to Venice with his wife. He loved it and had a wonderful time. He would like to return but he is too old. His sister and family came to California. This is the first time he told his wife about his grandma's hiding the men. She said they should tell someone involved in survivor stories.

50:00 She felt he should tell his story. His wife is responsible. He did not know the names of the men who stayed in his apartment. He wonders if they made it through. He thought that using the computer, he could find out. He lived at 1602 Pedrocchi Calle (Street) which was two blocks from the Town Center. He never heard of anyone else hiding Jews. They were afraid so no one discussed it. People who got caught were deported to a concentration camp. There were many Jews in the Jewish Ghetto. His grandma was small but strong and not afraid of anything. She never cursed, loved everyone, and never argued, a wonderful woman. She influenced him not to aggravate others, to love everyone, and get along with others. She was a smart, savvy woman.

55:00 Antonio said he is glad to provide this information and would be glad if some good comes out of it. He would be happy if he hears that anyone came through the war who the grandma hid, that good came of it.

56:00