

heirloom

—marie lucia birmingham

*One family's twist
of fate,
and a cherished
spring dish*

As I write my story, I am still in awe about what happened to me on my journey to Italy. I will begin my story with my grandmother, Lucia Scuncio, whom I did not know. She died of influenza when my mother, Philomena, was only 5 years old. I knew of her only in a photograph that I was given two years ago by a distant cousin, and that her grave number was 1648. The journey started here.

After doing research in the archives, I discovered her death certificate and learned that she died September 30, 1913. The same week, my daughter Gina told me she was expecting a baby and that her due date was September 30. Chloe Lucia was born September 30, the date my grandmother died. The nurse who took care of my daughter and our miracle baby was named Lucia.

These coincidences sent me on a mission to Italy. After spending two wonderful weeks in Sorrento with my husband and daughter, we decided to visit Prata Sannita on the last Wednesday of the vacation, a small town in Caserta where my grandparents were born. As we approached the *paese*, my heart and soul were in a state of disbelief that I would be visiting the place where my grandparents were born.

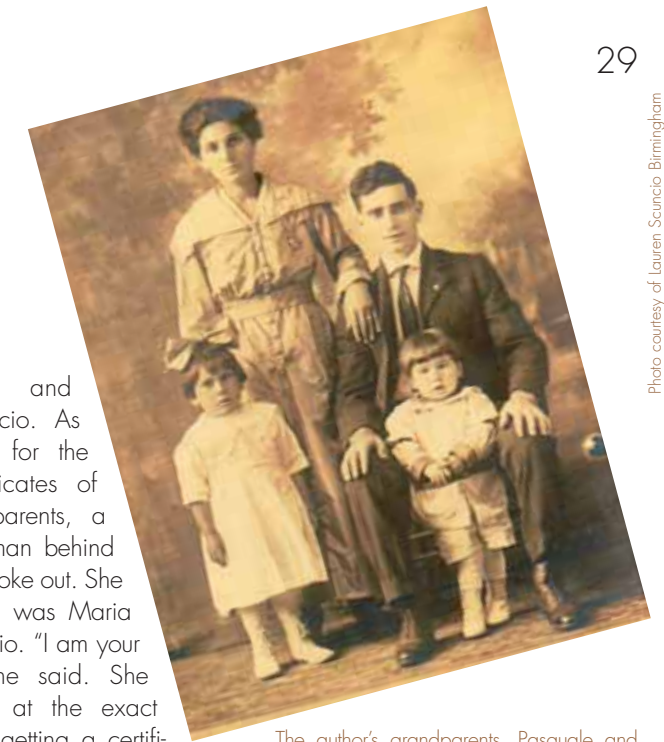
We traveled to City Hall to inquire about my grandparents,

Pasquale and Lucia Scuncio. As we asked for the birth certificates of my grandparents, a young woman behind us in line spoke out. She told us she was Maria Rosa Scuncio. "I am your cousin," she said. She was there at the exact same time getting a certificate for her daughter, Antonella.

The feelings that we all experienced that moment are unexplainable. It was a miracle, a gift from God. Everyone was crying, and this moment in time reunited a family. I knew in my heart that my grandmother had taken me by the hand—from the moment I was given her photograph to my destination in Prata Sannita.

We visited six Scuncio families, going from house to house. I saw the house where my grandfather was born. We had dinner at Maria Rosa's house with everything fresh from their land—*antipasti*, pasta, meats, cheese, wine; and most of all a warmth and love none of us had ever experienced.

As we left for Sorrento that night, the tears of joy and love overwhelmed us. It was a place in time that God gave to me to find my roots. My daughter Lauren now visits my family often. She has also fallen in love with Italy and has a passion of her own, called Cooking Vacations—a venture she is pursuing to help people visit this beautiful part of our universe. Our family now calls one another frequently—we share recipes and photographs, and we visit often. My life circle is now complete.



The author's grandparents, Pasquale and Lucia Scuncio, along with their children, Philomena and Antonio.

artichokes "alla lucia"

salt

8 artichokes, trimmed, stems and chokes removed

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

4 cloves garlic, minced

½ cup bread crumbs

¼ cup red wine

1 tablespoon red pepper flakes

Bring a pot of water to a boil. Add salt and the artichokes, and cook for about 20 minutes. Meanwhile, in a large skillet over medium heat, warm the olive oil. Add the garlic, and sauté until golden. Add the bread crumbs and toast, stirring. Pour in the wine, and season with salt and the red pepper flakes. Drain the artichokes, and add them to the skillet, tossing gently to coat with the sauce. **Serves 4**

Share your recipes!

No one knows the recipes, flavors and soul of traditional Italian dishes better than those with Italian heritage. Please share your family's heirloom recipes with our readers.

Send your recipes to:

Editorial Department
302 Fifth Avenue, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10001
or e-mail
liz@italiancookingandliving.com



artichokes "alla lucia"