

## Sant'Andrea 1935-1946

In 1935 the atmosphere in S. Andrea was laden with euphoria and golden dreams of the future. The Edificio scolastico was built. No longer children were required to attend school in classrooms scattered throughout the village. Water that quenched the thirst of the populace finally arrived to the village, and Andreolesi were no longer required to stand in line to take their turn at filling containers for the daily need of water. Our water supply was so great as to invite envy from Soverato and Isca which suffered of Saharan drought. Until then, our paesani relied on the water supplied by the Ferraro, Avanti, and Arriadi fountains. I believe the name Avanti and Arriadi derives from the vicinity of the two fountains and was intended to distinguish one from the other. The Arriadi was a few meters distance from the Avanti on the footpath (vijualu) that leads to the Gattineddha and Nerca. Where the footpath splits into a Y is where the Arriadi was located. If excavations were to me made, they would reveal a water reservoir (Giabbia-Buviari) used for the purpose of irrigating vegetable gardens and quenching the thirst of the village donkeys. Also, in 1935 a sanitary sewer was constructed thus eliminating the need of unhealthy septic systems, as well as affording people privacy while answering nature's calls. The Case Popolari were built during the same period in order to give decent living quarters to poor families. The Bevivino family, whose son Geom. Pierino eventually would give his life in the Spanish Civil War, were given quarters there in deference to their dead son. All these events were taking place in S. Andrea while other villages (Soverato included) suffered and experienced total neglect. It is my humble opinion that Ettore Calabretta, a very influential member of the Fascist Party, may have had a hand in the execution of the projects described above.

However, the year 1935 is also the year during which an event took place that eventually would spell catastrophe for the Italian Nation. Benito Mussolini, "Il Duce," to satisfy his sense of self glory and megalomania, decided to attack the helpless and backward nation of Ethiopia. It was accomplished in haste and with speed. Il Duce was on his way to reestablishing the glory and power that duly belonged to Rome. The war effort was partially financed with gold gladly donated (so the Fascist propaganda led us to believe) by all the Italian women. Anything of gold, wedding bands, earrings, necklaces, were requested in order to defray the costs of a noble cause!!! I remember vividly the time when members of the Fascist Party came to my house asking that my mother make her contribution to the war effort. She gave her wedding band with pretended enthusiasm. I could not help but notice that her eyes were welling with controlled tears as she removed the ring from her finger. I am sure that she was overcome by a sense of betrayal to my father.

Ethiopia was defeated in six months and Il Duce basked in imperial glory. School children (myself included) would roam the narrow cobble stoned streets of the paese singing "Faccetta Nera" and other songs intended to vilify Haile Salasie the Negus. The ode by the roman poet Orazio became so popular as to almost displace the "Piave" as the national anthem. It was sung in school even before the daily prayers.

Sole che sorgi libero e giocondo  
Su i colli nostri i tuoi cavalli doma  
Tu non vedrai nessuna cosa al mondo  
Maggior di Roma, Maggior di Roma

We sang it at all occasions, and there were plenty of them. One occupied Nation, however, does not make an empire! There must be another helpless nation which can easily be conquered! Il Duce, who now preferred the Latin term "Dux", did not have to look very far. Albania is only across from the Ionian sea. Our Queen Elena the spouse of Vittorio Emanuele III, hailed from Montenegro. Would not the Albanians and Montenegrini be excited at the thought of having one of their own as "Imperatrice" of the new Roman Empire? Of course!!! Albania was occupied in Ethiopian fashion. But territorial expansion in itself and by itself lacks totality. Ideological expansion is necessary to compliment territorial ones. The opportunity to disseminate ideology presented itself in the form of the Spanish Civil War. Our Duce plunged into it with almost vehemence. No war however is without a price.

Geom. Pierino Bevivino paid for a moment of glory with his life. Sargente Peppino Manello (the son of Cola e Colino) received wounds that afflicted him for the rest of his short life. There may have been others whom I do not call to mind. Worse yet, the Spanish Civil War, was the prelude to things to come. By the time 1939 arrived, rumors of war permeated the air. The success of the Fascist Forces in the Spanish Civil War did much to buoy the spirits and cockiness of the Fascists. It created the false sense of invincibility which in due time (very short time) would engulf the Italian Nation in the most disastrous war ever fought by man. Manifesti, fascist slogans, paramilitary exercises by Figli della Lupa (Sons of the she-wolf) Balillas, Avanguardisti (Avant Guard), Giovani Fascisti (Fascist Youth), and we were all required to be one or the other according to age, were all designed to convey a sense of strength and exude self confidence. I recall an incident during Mass in the Chiesa Matrice that turned out to be a Cassandra's prophecy. Pasquale Genco, the father of the future Mayor of S. Andrea, predicted that war would be imminent and that it would be ugly. Pasquale, a very gentle person, was uneducated and hardly an intellectual titan, however the signs all around us were so obvious that even he could read them and interpret them wisely. The air became laden with propaganda all designed to prepare the people for war and eliminate any resistance to Il Duce's plans. Finally one day in June, 1940, what was to be expected, came to pass!!! From the Dopolavoro's (A Fascist after work club) radio, exposed from a balcony overlooking the Pian Castello, the voice of Mussolini thundered through the airwaves announcing that "We have declared war against England and France" (WE HAVE? What is this WE). Italy and Germany will march together towards a successful Victory. English and French hegemony will be reduced to ashes. Rome shall regain its ancient Imperial Glory!!! The events that were to ensue during the next few years were neither imagined nor dreamed by the Austrian Corporal nor by the School Teacher from Predappio. Eja Eja Alala'!!!

The Eja Eja-Alala" and the "Viva il Duce" in response to the declaration of war were still wafting through the gentle hills of S. Andrea, when the ugliness of war presented itself at our doorsteps in the form of the fiercest naval battle ever fought in the Mediterranean sea. The "Battle of Punta Stilo" So called because of its geographical prominence, it should have been more aptly named "The battle of S. Andrea Ionio". That day, I and my cousins Andrea Codispoti and Dante Ranieri, in the company of our older friend Enzo Sama' (Il Gestore), were beachcombing along the shore when in the distance to the south we heard a rumbling. Thinking it to be thermal thunder, we proceeded to walk leisurly along the beach. The rumbling became louder and clearer as cruisers, destroyers, airplanes and battleships, engaged in a tenacious naval battle, were in front of our eyes. The fighting fleet was no more than 500 to 600 meters from shore. Scared out of our wits we ran for cover behind the trunks of mulberry trees (Puarghi). From there shaking with fear, we watched the battle action. We could actually see the sailors of both forces at their battle stations fighting bravely for their cause. We could hear the whistling of the projectiles as they traveled through space and witnessed the hits on the battleships (Corazzate) Giulio Cesare,

Cavour, and the cruiser Duilio. Badly damaged, they limped towards safer waters. Perhaps Taranto and Bari. With our fear subsided we returned to the Paese and met all the people who had watched the battle from a vantage point called "U Muriaddhu e Sofia" (The little wall next to Sofia's house). The scenario was to repeat itself in the years ahead. War demands that a price be paid by all uniformed participants as well as civilians. We were reminded that supreme sacrifices were necessary by all if the war effort was to be successful. Coupons for goods (Tessere) were issued to all households indicating the daily allowance for each person. (Bread 100 Grams, pasta 50 grams, oil 2 tbs. sugar 15 grams, butter 20 grams ecc. Sugar was a luxury and butter was unknown in S. Andrea at that time. At least I never saw any!!! The list of items allowed was endless and futile. The few things that we were familiar with, such as pasta, flour, rice, suddenly disappeared as if by magic, leaving behind shelves covered with dust. It only proves that the basic nature of man to survive indeed works. However the Fascist bureaucracy was not about to admit defeat They imagined to have a solution to the problem. The establishment of a consortium (Ammasso), to collect agricultural products would be the solution to the shortage problem. All citizens were required, by law, to bring to the Ammasso their harvest for general distribution to the public. Again as if by magic, all harvests became meager by design, and not much was contributed to the Ammasso. The managers of the Ammasso, usually lackeys of the Fascist establishment, however managed to profit from the system. Some people, too timid to defy the system, contributed to the Ammasso. The largest portion of the agricultural products, were being hidden in places that no bureaucrat could find. The black market thrived and the Bartering System became the norm for daily business. Flour mills did a flourishing business milling during the night as lookouts would alert them of any carabinieri or fascisti in the vicinity. Store shelves continued to be empty of goods, but the issue of coupons was automatic and timely. Bureaucrats have a way of creating situations which make no sense at all other than to justify their existence.

The coupons became a convenient source of toilet paper for the recently constructed sanitary sewers It was the only intrinsic value they had.

During the early stages of war the Axis experienced huge military successes against the Allies. France, under the relentless onslaught of the German forces capitulated in 28 days England, likewise, suffered so much bombing that a new word meaning total destruction entered the Italian Vocabulary ""Coventrizzare". The city of Coventry was practically razed to the ground by German bombs. Fascists proudly referred to Coventry as the Carthage of the 20th century.

The Duce or Dux, full of his own hot air and ready to show the Fascist military might, against German advice, decided to attack Greece and make that country a part of the new Roman Empire. The Greeks had other ideas!!!

The attack was launched from Albania and it had disastrous results. The black shirts, pride and joy of Mussolini, were repelled back to Albania and only the intervention of the Germans saved the day. Our own Ettore Calabretta, Consul in the Fascist Militia (I believe that was the equivalent rank of Colonel in the regular army) saw action in the battlefields of Greece, and except for complaining about the bitter cold, was never heard to boast or even talk about the exploits of his unit in the field of combat.

Still the general consensus was that the war would soon be over and Italy would once again have its place in the sun. English hegemony would be replaced by Roman leadership.

In S. Andrea, we too, believed that destiny was on our side (all warring parties have God or destiny on their side) and that the Roman Gods were smiling down on us from atop of Mount Olympus. There was one exception!! Nicola do Turchiu. Nicola Dominijanni, father of Ing. Gentile Dominijanni, dared to secretly disagree. He had in recent years returned from America and was familiar with the industrial might of the American Colossus.

He reasoned that the ties between England and the United States, and more specifically between Churchill and Roosevelt, ran too deep to be ignored. Franklin would not forsake his friend Winston and abandon him to the claws of Hitler and Mussolini. America would find a legitimate reason to enter the conflict on the side of England. American public opinion had to be developed and courted.

Nicola's hatred for anything Fascist was so intense, that upon returning from America, lived a life of self imposed exile at Alaca, never venturing into the paese, not even for major holidays (i.e. Christmas, Easter etc.). His resolve not to visit the paese was broken when his father in law died. He attended the funeral and during the wake made his prediction.

As the war continued, the economic situation became worse. It is a tribute to the Andreolesi that starvation was avoided. Every square meter of ground was cultivated and made productive.

Wooden sandals, clothing made from a fiber derived from ginestra and woven by looms (Tilari) that were common during that period, shod and clothed us. They were not High Fashion, but they kept us warm and protected our modesty. Our coffee became a brew of roasted acorns and grape seeds. Such brews became palatable only after the taste buds went on strike and eventually died of indifference. Viva Il Duce!!

In 1941 I was a student at the Istituto Salesiano of Soverato. One evening during cena, it was announced over the loud speaker that Japan had declared war against the United State. No mention was made of the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. The announcement was received with approval by the student body (Children). With Nicola's prediction resonating through my head. I became confused and chose silence rather than overt approval. How could he be so accurate? Was he a prophet? Were we in effect doomed? The answer was not long in coming. Air bases in North Africa served as launching pads to aerial bombardment the likes of which we had never witnessed. Italy was being coventrizzata.

Squadron upon squadron of B17-B24-B29 terrorized us day and night. S.Andrea fortunately, never became a direct target, but the psychological effect was nevertheless devastating. Our hearing became so sensitive to the rumbling of the airplane engines that we could hear them almost at takeoff from Africa or Malta. Leaflets dropped from the sky encouraged us to revolt and surrender. The defeat of the fascist Axis had been sealed!

In Libya, Field Marshall Montgomery was pushing German and Italian troops into the Mediterranean sea; Fascist propaganda could not bring itself to tell us the truth. Cities in the Tripolitania and Cereinaica which had fallen to the pressing British troops were announced as having been "strategically evacuated". Don Bruno Cosentino (Colabate) when advised that Tobruk had been strategically evacuated remarked "Beh, cadde, no, precipitò da sella" (he fell not, he was precipitously thrown off the saddle) and continued his daily passeggiata.

As the war effort went from bad to worse, so did the air raids. The rail center at Catanzaro Marina as well as a small airfield at Crotona became targets. The attacks came at noon or at night and played hell with our psyche. However, compared to larger cities we fared well. One day, completely out of the blue, S. Andrea became the host to a group of people from the northern part of Italy where the industrial centers were constantly under aerial attack. They came, unannounced, with the clothes on their back and an ample supply of Tessere with which to buy all the essentials that had been non existent in stores for years. It was a tribute to the generosity of the Andreolesi that they did not starve while in our midst. Transplantation can be a very traumatic experience to people (Emigrants will attest to that), and some cannot cope with it. Such was the case of an older gentleman who became so depressed and despondent that chose to do away with himself.

He hanged himself from an olive tree across from the cemetery on the road that led to Tralo'. His body remained there for three days when finally the pretore came from Davoli. The body had begun to decompose and offered a gruesome and macabre sight as insects of all kinds were crawling all over the corpse. Finally the Pretore arrived, after a delay of three days, and made a historical pronouncement. "Death was caused by strangulation" Such pronouncements can only be emanated by someone with a degree of Doctor of Jurisprudence!! Viva Il Duce!!!

I consider the stay of the sfollati among us to have been pleasant. Two of them married Andreolesi girls (the daughter of the Catanzarisi and the daughter of a Tufana) and at war end went north with their new husbands.

The war continued to worsen for the Axis, and rumors of an impending landing by the Allies were consistently circulated. Horror stories of rape, pillaging and other undesirable behavior by the invading troops became common daily fodder.

Some andreolesi chose to find a safe haven in the mountains, but not before sealing their belongings in the "Catojas" (basement-Cellar) by bricking up the entrance to conceal its existence. It turned out that the pillagers were not the invading troops but the andreolesi themselves. A few railroad cars had been held up at the S. Andrea station because of destroyed rail lines; they were discovered, broken into and all the contents stolen. The criminals were some of the andreolesi who over the years had strained to place the mantle of respectability on themselves. When the rightful owners showed up to claim and beg for the return of their goods, they were met with indifference and denials.

The landing in Sicily, which had been rumored for sometime, became a reality, the anticipated resistance by the Sicilians evaporating into fiction. Actually, the Sicilians ran to meet the American and British troops and embraced them as liberators.

King Vittorio, awakened from his 23 years of lethargic sleep, found the courage to replace Mussolini with Gen. Badoglio. The former Viceroy' of Ethiopia accepted the unconditional terms of surrender, and declared war on Germany.

Nicola do Turchiu ended his self imposed exile and ascended to the paese wearing the triumphant smile of the victor.

Except for the hope of clemency for war reparation, I do not, to this day, comprehend Badoglio's declaration of war against Germany. The Italian forces were a non-factor and demoralized beyond comprehension. The most important goal of the Italian soldier (and I am not here to fault them, they tried to fight a war that should have never been) was to abandon all arms and get home as best he could. Rifles, machineguns, ammunition and plastic explosives were strewn throughout the countryside. It was even rumored that Badolatesi had an armored tank hidden in Badolato. I do not believe that to be true.

As the German troops were fleeing to establish new defensive positions, we breathed a sense of relief; for us the war was over. There would be bloody battles to be fought at Monte Cassino, Salerno, Anzio, but those were someone else's battles and of no concern to us. We witnessed the beginning and were indeed fortunate enough to see the end. Others were not so lucky! It was a beautiful experience to be alive!!

The fall of Fascism was not without internal political rifts. Fresh political ideas are a welcome fresh air that energizes a nation; the political rifts to which I am referring have a destructive and sinister effect. General Graziani, a former colleague of Badoglio during the Ethiopian campaign, was disgruntled by the declaration of war against Germany, Italy's former ally. He considered such war declaration, to be both a national as well as a military dishonor. General Graziani opted to fight on the side of the Germans and after the war, faced charges for treason, but was adjudicated "Not Guilty". Some young andreolesi elected to emulate the great Graziani and went to the German side. Antonio Varano and Valerio Valenti, whom I knew well, lost their lives in the process.

There was no stopping the allied forces. City after city was liberated from the grips of German occupation and the war moved further and further north. The liberation of Rome was cause for celebration as many andreolesi lived there and news of their well being was welcome. Little did we know at the time that the son of an andreolese would have a major role in its liberation. Col Salvatore Armogida, the son of Francesco and Maria Armogida would lead his 313th Combat Engineers Battalion of the 88th Division through the gates of the Eternal City and thus liberating it from German occupation. The number of Andreolesi fighting with American Forces was astounding. They came to visit aging parents and relatives. Some of them were: Col Armogida, Ferraro, Santo Frustaci, Nicola Codispoti, Luigi Codispoti (My uncle), Vincenzo Codispoti, and many others who do not come to mind. Dante Mongiardo, who had qualified for a few days of R&R (rest & recuperation) never made it. I can still see his maternal grandfather, Piappi da Mastriceddha; decanting wine from the demijohn in anticipation of his grandson's visit. Dante was killed in action and what was to be a celebration became mourning.

As cities were being liberated our paese experienced an influx of former citizens who had been exiled by Fascism. Alfonso Cosentino, because of his political intensity comes to mind first. He was one of the main forces behind the formation of the Communist Party. National political exiles such as De Gasperi, Togliatti, Nenni, Pacciardi, fed the flames of political freedom to intoxicating levels.

Unaccustomed, as we were to the democratic processes, the body and soul of democracy was tested to almost the breaking point. Expressed political views were deemed to be frontal attacks against those who dared to differ in opinion. Many families, who, for years, had enjoyed a warm and close relationship, became estranged and political enemies to be avoided by all members of the family. Comizi, intended to educate on choice, became battlegrounds for fighting, knifing, hand grenade throwing and whatever else was necessary to dwarf and scathe the enemy. Communist and Christian Democrats battled for ideological supremacy and electoral votes. Some of my friends, who had been students of Don Ciccio and were active at the Oratorio, splintered and went in different directions. I leaned towards Pacciardi and the Republican Party. I enjoyed the many friendships which I had so carefully nurtured over the years, and chose to remain somewhat neutral.

The Communist Party: The strength of the party lay within three individuals. Their intellectual prowess and sense of moral integrity did much to attract members. They exhibited dynamic personality as well as political passion. I am speaking of Architetto Francesco Armogida, Italo Jannone and Alfonso Cosentino.

There were some political opportunist; however their names shall go unmentioned.

The rest of the party was comprised of people who had a score to settle with Francesco and Falcone Lucifero. The Lucifero family, I believe, is still holding hostage the development of S. Andrea Marina.

The Christian Democracy: It consisted of people who had strong religious beliefs, shop keepers, some of Lucifero "Garzoni," and self proclaimed aristocrats. Its strength lay among women who were afraid of the burning fires of hell.

I have difficulty naming any distinguished leaders other than Pepe' Sama', now Padre Sama' Gesuita.

The post war period can only be described as total "Chaos". The black market continued to flourish and thrive in a quasi-lawless State. American occupation troops, anxious to quench their thirst for alcohol and satisfy the appetite of the flesh, were willing partners in the pursuit of black market deals.

The Italian infrastructure, which before the war was almost primitive, disappeared completely. Railways, bridges, roads became impassable. Trains became a twice a week experience, if they arrived at all.

When they did arrive, they were filled to capacity and passengers were forced to ride on the outside. Trains became human beehives on wheels. They were dangerous and arrival to destination was always unpredictable.

Some passengers who dared to ride the bumpers that coupled the cars together fell in between the cars and were killed. I once rode to Naples holding on to a door handle and could feel my backpack scrape the walls of the tunnels. A very scary experience!!

Will the situation ever end? And if so, when? Pessimism began to crowd my mind, thoughts of emigration started to settle in my head. I had never known my father and yearned to learn who he was, besides the good family provider that took care of my, as well as my mother's well being. Perhaps it was time to join him in America and get away from the hellhole that the good Duce had provided for all Italians.

I communicated my thoughts to my good friend Nicolino Romeo and Nicola Dominijanni (Nicola do Turchiu). I had attained the maturita' classica from the Liceo Pio XII of Nicotera that year, and Nicolino's advice was for me to pursue a medical diploma and then emigrate to America. Excellent advice!! Nicola, on the other hand, would fill me with tempting stories about America that became too enticing to resist. Erroneously I concluded that the worst possible life in America would always excel life as a doctor in Italy. The die had been cast!! By American laws I was an American citizen and entitled to all privileges due them except the presidency and I had no such aspirations.

The necessary documents were prepared in no time at all; soon I would be on my way to the land of milk and honey, walking on streets paved with gold (to the devil with mpetrati and dusty roads) and picking money from the money tree. Before the departure however, my mother insisted that the Oracle of Padre Pio be consulted. In the company of Prof Alberto Voci I headed for San Giovanni Rotondo. I made confession, received communion, was assured by the future Saint that the voyage would be successful and to allay all anxieties. The trip to San Giovanni Rotondo and return to S. Andrea had been a total disaster in travel experience, it cemented my conviction that leaving Italy was the wise thing to do.

In November 1946, accompanied by my numerous friends, I rode to the rail station in the old Balilla (Fiat) of Tommaso Carchidi and departed for Naples. Saying goodbye to my many friends was, to this day, the most painful and emotional moment that only an emigrant will understand and feel. The Marine Perch, a troop carrier during the war, leased to the American Export Lines, was awaiting me in Naples. I embarked and in short time I watched the Neapolitan coast line disappear before my eyes. Suddenly my heart sank and I began to cry. Fear of the future gripped my heart and soul and all I could think about was "Nicola, damn you, you had better be right!!"

A storm off the coast of Spain created waves so high that they totally engulfed the ship, but seasickness was never a problem. Aboard ship there was an abundance of food, drink and cigarettes, all combined to create a heavenly experience for my senses.

The Saturnia (our rescue ship) returned to New York and docked on pier 83. The port facilities and the surrounding area gave no indication of gold. On the contrary, I saw so many black people that I wondered if we had not landed in Ethiopia by mistake. Angelo, welcome to America!

Adjusting to a new culture is difficult. One must not only divest himself of all previously acquired cultural traits, one must learn to acquire new ones and make a sincere effort to get along with strangers. I was fortunate: Canton, Ohio at the time had a large colony of androlesi who helped me make the transition to the new life. Four years at Ohio State University and two years of military service during the Korean conflict, afforded me the opportunity to enter the mainstream of American life.

Do I have any regrets? In life there are always regrets, but in retrospect I would not change anything I hate sciences and would not have been a good doctor anyways!

I have had a good ride in life,I count my blessings and am thankful to my God for what he has bestowed upon me.

To Francesco Romeo, our web master, to Alfredo Varano, a passionate enthusiast of andreolese culture .my heartfelt appreciation and gratitude for the opportunity to reconnect by means of cybernetics with the past and pass it on to the new generations.

To Anna, the faithful translator and faithful collaborator, I love you as one of my own.

The events that I have recounted are from personal memory as I remember them. Lack of integrity in the writer is deception to the readers.

To all andreolesi of the world I love you.

Angelo Iorfida,October 23,2002 Canton,Ohio USA

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